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CLAN DICTONARY

[image]

ThunderClan:

Leader Amberstar- a light brown tortoiseshell she-cat with darker markings

Deputy Shadowblaze- a black and gray she-cat

Medicine cat Cloverwish- a light gray she-cat with white swirl markings

Warriors:

Doefoot- beautiful light brown she-cat with white colored specks across her back

Ashtail- a black tom with a gray splotches

Hawkfang- a dark brown tom with large battle scars

Goldenheart- a orange tabby tom with long fur and white chest

Cloudyfur- a small pure white tom

Autumnleaf- a tortoiseshell she-cat

Mossclaw- dark gray tom with black specks

Owlwhisker- a dark brown tom

Blossomfall- a light brown tabby she-cat

Apprentices:

Silentpaw- a shy, pale colored she-cat

Sunpaw- a orange tabby tom

Skypaw- tan colored she-cat with orange paws and markings

Queens (she-cats expecting, or caring for kits):

Silverlilly- a light gray she-cat

Elders:

Halfface- a light tabby tom with a huge scar across his face

Claystripe- light orange tom with dark orange stripes

Kits:

Pebblekit- a light gray she-cat

Snowykit: a gray tom with white chest and belly

Brakenkit- dark brown tom with light colored markings

Shadowclan:

Leader Bearstar- large, dark brown tom

Deputy Fangtooth- pure black tom with very sharp fangs

Medicine cat Raspberrywhisper- a rusty, orange colored she-cat

Warriors:

Waterlilly- a light gray she-cat

Forestclaw- braken colored tom

Darkpool- a dark gray tom with a black muzzle

Blazepelt- fire colored tom with light orange swirls

Roseheart- pure white she-cat

Mistyfur- light gray, beautiful she-cat

Dustyfur- pale tabby tom

Dapplepelt- tortoiseshell she-cat

Apprentices:

Lillypaw- white and gray she-cat

Dovepaw- dark gray she-cat

Oceanpaw- black she-cat with dark gray markings

Queens:

Riverpebble- light and dark gray she-cat

Peachpelt- pale colored she-cat with light orange markings

Elders:

Leafwhisker- light brown tabby tom

Pumkinpelt- dull, orange tabby she-cat

Frogmoss- mossy gray colored tom

Kits:

Thistlekit- light gray she-cat with dark colored specs

Rainkit- dark gray she-cat

Riverclan:

Leader Crowstar- dark gray and black tom

Deputy Gingerpelt- a light orange tabby tom

Medicine cat Pearlfeather- white and light gray she-cat

Warriors:

Honeypelt- a light, pale colored she-cat

Sandfur- a white and pale colored she-cat

Sagebreeze- long furred, light brown she-cat

Cottenclaw- huge white tom

Rainfall- dark gray she-cat

Fishpelt- gray and white tortoiseshell tom

Rustyfur- dark orange tom

Treeleap- dark brown tom with lighter swirls

Apprentices:

Shrewpaw- light brown tabby tom

Checkeredpaw- black tom with white spots

Mistpaw- white she-cat with black markings

Twigpaw- dark brown tabby tom

Queens:

Sparrowheart- light brown she-cat with dark brown markings

Elders:

Winterpelt- white scrawny tom

Kits:

Mudkit- dark brown tom

Fernkit- light brown she-cat with white chest

Briarkit- white, shaggy furred she-cat

Windclan:

Leader Falconstar- dark brown tabby tom

Deputy Ivyclaw- dark gray she-cat with light gray markings and

scar across her eye

Medicine cat Arcticwind- pure white she cat who is blind

Medicine cat apprentice Fadepaw- dark gray she-cat with white markings

Warriors:

Nightwind- pure black she-cat with dark gray paws and muzzle

Quietwave- dark gray tortoiseshell she-cat

Tigerwhisker- bright orange tom with long fur

Smokeface- light gray tom, with dark gray markings on his face

Silverleaf- silver colored she-cat

Lightberry- tan colored she-cat

Waspclaw- pure black tom

Aspenberry- tortoiseshell she-cat

Duskcloud- light brown tom

Apprentices:

Branchpaw- dark gray tabby tom

Ravenpaw- pure black she-cat

Queens:

Muddymist- dark brown she-cat with light brown swirls

Swanstrike- pure white she-cat

Elders:

Darkheart- dark gray, shaggy furred tom

Mossyblaze- half blind, tan colored tom

Fishpounce- light gray tom with white chest, belly, and muzzle

Kits:

Featherkit- light gray she-cat

Breezekit- pure white tom with dark gray muzzle and paws

Sprucekit- light brown tom with dark brown paws and muzzle

TERRITORY EXPLANATION:

THUNDERCLAN:
CONSISTS OF TALL TREES AND BRUSH.
NEAR RIVERCLAN AND SHADOWCLAN.
SEPARATED FROM RIVERCLAN BY A RIVER.
SEPARATED FROM SHADOWCLAN BY THE THUNDERPATH.

SHADOWCLAN:
CONSISTS OF TALL PINE TREES AND SHADE.
NEAR THUNDERCLAN AND WINDCLAN.
SEPARATED FROM WINDCLAN BY SCENT MARKINGS.

WINDCLAN:
CONSISTS OF LARGE OPEN PLAINS AND BRUSH.
NEAR SHADOWCLAN AND RIVERCLAN.
SEPARATED FROM RIVERCLAN BY SCENT MARKINGS.

RIVERCLAN:
CONSISTS OF A MARSHY AREA
NEAR THUNDERCLAN AND WINDCLAN.

Prolouge

[image]

The night was warm, minus the slight breeze, and the full moon shined high above in the sky. The moonlight spread across the vast plains, and the five cats padded through the tall grass, heading towards the tall mountain.

Fadepaw trailed behind her mentor, Arcticwind, who was leading the cats. She was surprised about how fast the medicine cat was walking, for she knew the white she-cat had been blind since she was a kit. Yet it made sense since this *was* their territory in Windclan. Her thoughts were interrupted as Pearlfeather padded up beside Fadepaw and purred.

"How are you liking being a medicine cat apprentice?" The white and gray she-cat asked.

Fadepaw purred back. "I'm really enjoying it! I only started a few moons ago, but it really seems to be my calling."

A rusty orange she-cat padded up to Fadepaw's other shoulder.

"If you've been Arcticwind's apprentice for that long, shouldn't you have already been to the moon stone already?" The orange cat joked.

"Raspberrywhisper!" Pearlfeather hissed silently.

"Well when you say it like that..." Fadepaw murmured.

"Would you stop yapping already?" Arcticwind turned and glared at the three cats. "I enjoy walking in *silence*."

"Sorry..." Fadepaw gazed at her paws. She hated when she angered her mentor.

Arcticwind sniffed the air then sighed. "Wheres Cloverwish?"

All the cats looked around with equal annoyance. Suddenly, a light gray she-cat with swirl markings stumbled out of a bush near Pearlfeather, who jumped with a screech.

"Sorry! My fur got stuck on the other end of that bush. I thought I smelled some juniper berries under it. Thunderclan's running out of them, you know!" Cloverwish huffed.

Arcticwind rolled her sightless eyes and turned. "Lets just keep going. The moon's almost at its highest." The four cats followed the white she-cat sullenly.

"How did she know that?" Fadepaw whispered to Pearlfeather.

The lovely she-cat gazed down at the apprentice in confusion.

"What do you mean?"

"How did Arcticwind know the moon was almost at its highest?"

Pearlfeather gazed up at the sky and nodded.

"Arcticwind may be blind, but she is known to be the most wise cat in all the clans. Some things she just...knows."
Fadepaw gazed at her mentor in awe as the medicine cats continued their trek.
~
"We are here." Arcticwind paused at the entrance of the tunnel leading into the side of the mountain.

Cloverwish purred at Fadepaw. "Ready?"

Fadepaw nodded and puffed her dark gray fur against the incoming wind, before padding after her mentor into the tunnel.

It was pitch black as she entered, and she sniffed the air, following Arcticwind's scent. As the scents poured over her, she realized Pearlfeather was behind her, followed by Raspberrywhisper, then Cloverwish.

A few moments passed as she continued to pad through the dark tunnel, until suddenly, a dim light glowed ahead of her. Fadepaw

could now see her mentor as the light grew, until she could see every detail in the tunnel walls.

The darkness completely faded away as she padded into a dense cave. In the center of the cave was a tall, glowing stone.

At the roof, was a medium sized hole, right above the stone, where the moon was slowly creeping to fit the outline.

"The moonlight is what makes the stone glow." Pearlfeather whispered to Fadepaw, as she padded up to her.

"Its beautiful..." Fadepaw purred.

"Isn't it?" Raspberrywhisper padded from the tunnel, followed by Cloverwish.

"Alright alright, we get it, the stone's pretty, now can we please get a move on? The moon will be at its highest any moment now." Arcticwind hissed.

Raspberrywhisper rolled her eyes and padded over to Arcticwind, who was now crouched in front of the stone, inches away. The others cats followed suit, leaving Fadepaw confused.

"Come here, Fadepaw." Arcticwind meowed, flicking her tail impatiently.

Fadepaw quickly joined her mentor and watched as the rest of the medicine cats crouched in front of the stone. She did the same and a few moments passed before her mentor finally spoke.

"Its time. Now Fadepaw, lightly press your nose to the stone and close your eyes. Starclan will do the rest." With that, Arcticwind pressed her nose to the stone, the other cats doing the same.

The cave was suddenly dead silent. Fadepaw shivered as she watched the cats breathing slow. It was as if they were asleep. She then turned her attention to the stone, taking a deep breath before pressing her nose to it, closing her eyes.

Ice seemed to seep through her fur and into her skin. Her entire

body seemed to be frozen solid. She wanted to yowl with surprise, but no sound came out. Colors danced behind her eyelids until blurry images began to shape.

~

Before the images could fully be formed, Fadepaw screeched silently as she felt herself fall. Suddenly, her paws hit the ground and her eyes snapped open. Fadepaw was no longer in the moon stones cave, she was in a shaded forest with tall pine trees. She gazed around fearfully, then gasped.

"This is Shadowclan territory..." Fadepaw took a shaky step and sniffed the air, gagging. "Yup...definitely Shadowclan scent."

Her fur suddenly stood on end as she felt something was behind her. She whipped around with a hiss as a large cat leaped from a bush, soaring over her. Fadepaw yowled in surprised as more cats followed suit, leaping over and around her. She watched as they trampled through the brush, yowling battle cries.

Fadepaw stood there for what seemed like forever, as more and more cats trampled past her.

She sniffed the air. *This scent doesn't smell like any of the clans scent.* She thought. *Where are they even going?!*

Fadepaw hissed with frustration as one more cat leaped through the brush and followed the huge group of cats. She turned on her heels and raced after them.

She followed the cats through the Shadowclan trees, leaping over rocks and bushes. Suddenly, the cats disappeared over a small ledge, causing Fadepaw to screech to a stop. She panted, out of breath, and gazed over the ledge and gasped.

The cats had traveled to four-trees, the known meeting spot that each clan meets at, every eight moons. The sacred place had been known as a place of peace, where no clan was aloud to fight during these meetings. Yet, as Fadepaw gazed down into the clearing, cats of every shape and size were fighting with loud screeches and yowls.

Scents overwhelmed her nose as the unknown cats scent mixed with every scent from each clan. Thunderclan, Riverclan, Shadowclan, and Windclan cats fought against the strange group with large ferocity, yet it was obvious the strange cats were winning the battle.

Blood was all over the four-trees roots, where the trees stood in the middle of the clearing. The large branches where leaders where known to sit on during the meetings, was being used as another fighting spot, where cats were thrown off the sides, hitting the ground with a sickeningly crunch.

Fadepaw pinned her ears back and yowled as her eyes landed on a cat down in the clearing, fighting against a huge tom.

"Ravenpaw!" She yowled, but it was as if her sibling couldn't hear her. She tried to move her paws but she couldn't. She looked down and screeched as she slowly sunk into the ground, her paws halfway under the earth.

She tried to yank her paws free but it only made her sink faster. The yowls of pain from the clearing was suddenly all she could hear as her head went under.

It was pitch black, until Fadepaw realized her eyes were simply closed. She opened them and looked around. She was in a beautiful meadow, with wild flowers on almost every leaf. She sniffed the air, wondering witch territory she was in, but realized the only scent she could smell was her own.

Suddenly, a bright, outlined shape began to form in front of her, and she gasped as a large, white and tan colored she-cat took form. Her fur seemed to be outlined with stars and her beauty was overwhelming.

"Greetings Fadepaw." The she-cat spoke with what seemed to be the most calming voice Fadepaw had ever heard. "My name is Winterstar. I was Windclan's leader before my deputy Falconstar, took my place."

Fadepaw nodded. "I've heard stories about you. You lost your ninth life during leafbare to green cough. You got so sick because you

refused to eat... you wanted your clan to eat first. You said the same thing about the medicine they offered you."

Winterstar nodded. "I promised I would die for my clan. I always keep my promises."

Fadepaw gazed at the white cat with confusion. "Why did you show me that? The battle. Is that in the future? I saw my sister there. She looked bigger then she does now, Winterstar I-

"Fadepaw I do not have much time." The past leader interrupted.

"Leaf fall will destroy the clans. Unless the four born on the battle of dark and light can unite, and use what they have been given. Only four will save the clans."

Fadepaw stared at Winterstar with confusion as the white cat slowly began to fade.

"Only four will save the clans." The voice echoed around the meadow.

"Wait! Winterstar! What does that mean?!" Fadepaw began to run towards the fading cat, but the more she ran, the farther Winterstar seemed to get.

"Only four will save the clans."

"I know! But what does it mean?!" Fadepaw ran faster as the cat faded completely. "Winterstar!"

Suddenly her paws were no longer on solid ground as the meadow disappeared as well, and Fadepaw began to fall. She screeched as she landed on solid ground with a loud thump. She shakily stood up and looked up to see a large, shadowed cat standing in front of her.

Its voice was husky and almost hidden as it yowled, "Leaf fall will destroy the clans!" It swiped its long claws at Fadepaw's face and she yowled as pain flooded her vision to darkness. "Only four will save the clans!" Winterstars voice sounded from somewhere. "Only four will-

~

"Fadepaw, wake up!"

Her eyes snapped open and the pain faded as she gazed up at Arcticwind. The rest of the medicine cats stood around her with worried looks.

"A-Arcticwind?" She mumbled shakily. The blind cat gazed down at her with an equally worriedly look. This scared Fadepaw deeply.

"Let me guess, only four will save the clans?" The blind cat asked.

Fadepaw's eyes widened. "How did you know?"

Pearlfeather stepped forward. "We all had the same dream... first the battle scene at four-trees, then a past leader from our clan who told us all the same thing."

"It's a prophecy." Raspberrywhisper hissed. "It has to be."

"Were guessing the battle scene we saw was a glimpse into the future." Cloverwish whispered.

Fadepaw stumbled to her paws. "We have to warn the clans!" She shook on her feet and fell back over as the blood rushed to her head, making her dizzy.

"Not so hasty." Arcticwind meowed. "You just had your first visit with Starclan. You can't just be jumping to your paws like that."

Fadepaw nodded as her head stopped spinning and slowly rose to her paws.

"But she *is* right." Raspberrywhisper meowed. "We should head back immediately." Arcticwind nodded. "We shall tell our leaders of this discovery, and brainstorm what the prophecy could mean. Next high moon we shall re-evaluate the situation."

The medicine cats all nodded and began to file out of the cave and into the tunnel.

"Thats it?" Fadepaw huffed. "Re-evaluate the situation? It sounds like we will be doing nothing."

Arcticwind glared down at Fadepaw. "We are doing what we can with what we know. You are only an apprentice. So keep your mouth shut."

Fadepaw reared back at her mentors words and nodded, looking at her paws.

"Lets go." Her mentor growled.
~
The medicine cats padded through the plains once again, the moon shining high at its final peak of the night. As they neared the Windclan camp, Fadepaw meowed a quick goodbye to the other cats before changing course with her mentor towards camp.
A few minutes passed as the two cats padded silently, when suddenly Arcticwind stopped, her ears pricked.

"Arcticwind?" Fadepaw meowed, worried.

"Somethings wrong..." The white cat mumbled.

Suddenly, a tan colored she-cat leaped from a nearby bush and landed in front of the cats.

"Lightberry!" Arcticwind hissed in surprise. "Whats going on?"

"We just got word of a massive battle between Riverclan and Shadowclan breaking out!"The she-cat huffed, out of breath. "Falconstar wanted me to retrieve you both, just in case the battle increases into our territory."

Fadepaw's eyes widened and she looked at Arcticwind, who was gazing at the stars with sightless eyes. It was silent for a few moments before the white cat spoke.

"The battle between dark and light has begun..."

Chapter One

[image]

Brackenkit yawned as his eyes opened from a good nights sleep. He gazed around the small nursery and stretched, nudging his brother, Snowykit. The gray kit groaned and rolled over, away from Brackenkit's paw.

"Wake up, Snowykit! Before Silverlilly wakes up." He glanced at the entrance to the den, where a soft glow was seen from outside.

"Would you two mouse brains be quiet? I'm trying to sleep!" Pebblekit meowed from beside her mother, Silverlilly.

"Snowykit!" Brackenkit nudged him again with an urgent whisper.

"Fine, fine... I'm up..." Snowykit rose to his paws slowly, yawning.

"Now come on!" Brackenkit swatted at him with a playful paw and skipped out of the den. Scents filled his nose as he gazed around the Thunderclan camp.

A small group of warriors where huddled together by the entrance to the camp, along with the deputy of the clan, Shadowblaze, who was probably organizing hunting or border patrols. Cloverwish, the medicine cat, was over by the highrock speaking quietly to the leader of Thunderclan, Amberstar.

Snowykit trampled out of the den, pouncing on Brackenkit with a small yowl. The two kits rolled around on the ground before Brackenkit finally got the upper hand and pinned Snowykit on his back.

"Gotcha!"

"Nice pin, Brackenkit." The two kits turned to see a small white tom standing in front of the warriors den near the nursery.

"Thanks Cloudyfur!" Brackenkit purred in triumph.

Snowykit pushed the brown colored kit off of him and rolled his eyes.

"Yeah, thanks Cloudyfur..."

The white tom padded over and flicked his tail with amusement.

"I have a feeling you two will be great apprentices, just like I was."

Snowykit flicked his ear. "Actually, if I would want to be like any warrior, it would have to be Smokeface. He's the best fighter in the clan!"

Cloudyfur huffed. "Hey! Is it because I'm your father and I constantly embarrass you?" The tom began licking Snowykits head roughly.

"Hey! Get off, get off!"

Brackenkit turned his head as Silverlilly padded out of the nursery, followed by Pebblekit.

"You guys are so loud. Now I have no choice but to be awake." The light gray she-kit meowed.

Silverlilly purred down at the sassy kit.

"Be nice, Pebblekit." She then turned to Cloudyfur and rubbed her head against his neck. "How are the morning patrols going?" She asked him.

He purred back with equal love. "Good so far. Shadowblaze should be sending out hunting patrols soon."

Snowykit rolled his eyes and crouched at Brackenkit, growling playfully.

"I vote for a rematch!"

Brackenkit crouched as well and hissed. "Bring it mouse dung!"

As the two tom kits rustled around the camp, Pebblekit rolled her

eyes once again before stepping into a crouch, pouncing on Brackenkit, who had pinned Snowykit again.

"Gah!" Brackenkit screeched in surprise at his sisters sudden attack.

She swatted at him across the ears then turned to Snowykit, pouncing on him. The two kits rolled around the camp floor for a few seconds before Pebblekit gained control and pinned the gray kit.

"Thats for waking me up before sunrise." The she-kit hissed.

She stepped off her surprised brother, and padded back to Silverlilly and Cloudyfur, her tail in the air. The two cats had paused to watch the encounter, and sat with wide eyes.

"You managed to pin them both in a few seconds..." Cloudyfur meowed in surprise. "Well done..." he glanced at Silverlilly and she nodded.

"You kits head back into the nursery. We're just going to speak to Cloverwish about...something."

The three kits glanced at each other, confused.

"But we-

Snowykit started before being interrupted by Cloudyfur. "You heard her. Into the nursery." His voice was stern.

The kits mumbled with irritation, but listened to the white tom, padding back into the nursery. Pebblekit stretched, sighing.

"Now I'm wide awake and we're stuck in here because of you two." She hissed.

Snowykit glared at the she-kit. "We didn't do anything! They probably are just talking about warrior stuff."

"Silverlilly hasn't been out doing warrior duties since she had us, you mouse brain." Pebblekit hissed. "In my opinion, they're talking about something bigger."

"Like what?" Brackenkit questioned.

"I've heard rumors about a prophecy..." Pebblekit whispered. "Something about the clans being at risk of destruction."

Snowykit rolled his eyes. "Where have you heard that? Silverlilly says Thunderclan is the safest place in the world and that nothing bad will ever happen to us if-

"Queens always say that to their kits you mouse brain!" Pebblekit growled. The two kits continued to bicker with one another and Brackenkit sighed. Though he did wonder if Pebblekit was right.

What if there is *a prophecy?*

"I'll show you whose a mouse brain!" Snowykit screeched and hurled himself at his sister.

The two kits rolled around on the ground, making it the perfect time for Brackenkit to sneak quietly out of the den.

The brown kit sighed and gazed around the camp. The patrols looked like they had just left, making the camp seem almost empty, other then the few cats sitting and talking quietly amongst themselves.

Brackenkit waited until he was sure no cat was looking, before scrambling up and around to the back of the nursery.

The den was at the very edge of the camp wall, so Brackenkit had to climb up and around the dens that lined the wall to stay out of sight. He had used this tactic many times while playing catch-the-mouse. He won every time because his siblings could never find him behind the den walls.

He continued his way until he caught sight of the familiar medicine den. A small tree stood beside the back side of the den. As Brackenkit gazed at the tree, an idea hit him.

Unsheathing his tiny claws, he scrambled his way up the tree with surprising ease. He climbed until he reached a branch hidden with leaves, right above the roof of the medicine den. He stepped onto

the branch and walked slowly, until he spotted a small hole in the roof where he peered down just enough to see the fur of two cats.

He sniffed the air, trying to recognize the scents of which cats were in the den.
Cloudyfur and Silverlilly obviously...and Cloverwish
and...Amberstar?
Low murmurs could be sounded from the small hole, making Brackenkit strain to hear the words.

-watching her for some time now." Cloudyfur's voice spoke. "And today was an example of another sign."

There was a small silence before Amberstar's voice sounded from the hole.

"We can't know for sure. It could be any of them."

"But Brackenkit...it wouldn't be possible could it?" Silverlilly said in a hushed voice. It almost sounded...guilty.

Another silence.

"Cloverwish confirmed that night that he had just been born. Which means they were all born on the same night." The leader meowed.

What are they talking about? Brackenkit thought.

"Amberstar's right." Cloverwish whispered. "It could very well be any of them. We must keep our options open. For the fate of the clans. We mustn't get it wrong."

Another silence.

"The three of them will be apprentices in a quarter moon. We will have a better chance of evaluation then."

Well, their definitely talking about us...

The three cats meowed in agreement. "Until then, we must wait." The leader meowed.

The conversation seemed to be over as Cloudyfur and Silverlilly padded out. Seeing that as a cue, Brackenkit quickly padded off of the branch before clawing his way down the tree with more surprising ease.

He then sprinted back to the nursery behind the dens, hoping the two cats wouldn't return to the den before he did. He sprinted out as soon as he got to the nursery, before screeching to halt, almost running into Cloudyfur.

"Whoa! Didn't we say to stay in the den?" The white tom questioned, unlikely knowing the kit had just eavesdropped.

"Sorry I... had to... make a dung."

Cloudyfur held back a hiss of laughter. "Well when you say it like that!" Shaking his head, he padded over to Silverlilly, who had placed herself by the fresh kill pile.

Brackenkit let out the air he was holding in and sat down with a huff.

Pebblekit and Snowykit padded out of the nursery, still squabbling.

"Whatever, mouse brain." Pebblekit hissed before sitting next to Brackenkit. "Where did *you* go?"

Brackenkit was barley listening.
"Making a dung.."

"Gross. Im starving." With that, the she-kit padded over to the fresh kill pile, joining the others.

"Me too." Snowykit meowed, following his sister. He then stopped and turned. "You coming?"

"Later."

With that, the gray kit shrugged and padded off.

Brackenkit stared off at nothing, deep in thought.

What did they mean by: "That night he was born on the same night as the other two?" Of course we were!

He sighed, glancing at his kin. They're beautiful white and gray coats sparkled in the dim sunlight. He then glanced at his own dark brown fur and his eyes widened.

Unless... I was never their kin in the first place.

Chapter Two

[image]

The slight newleaf breeze made Thistlekit's light gray fur blow in the wind, and the small she-kit shivered slightly.

The dark pine tree forest was quiet and cool, the only sound being the occasional tweet of a bird. Thistlekit breathed in the fresh air and purred, happy to be out of camp. Her senses were on high alert, it was as if she could hear and smell almost everything in the entire forest.

"We should really head back now, Thistlekit..." A small meow sounded from behind her. She turned and rolled her eyes at her sister.

"Oh come on, Rainkit. Lighten up a bit! Doesn't is feel good to be somewhere else *besides* camp?"

The dark gray she-kit looked around anxiously. "I won't deny that, but kits aren't supposed to leave camp until their 6 moons old for a reason. Anything could be out here!"

Thistlekit huffed and continued to pad through the trees, gazing around in wonder. "The only thing I hear are birds and the leaves in the trees."

Rainkit squeaked in fear, racing over to her sisters side, catching up to her. Thistlekit rolled her eyes again.

"Your such a scaredy-cat."

"Am not!"

"Are!"

Suddenly, an unsettling noise sounded from a mile away, causing Thistlekit to stop, raising her tail in a halting motion.

"What is it...?" Rainkit whimpered.

"I don't know...but there's a scent I can't recognize." Thistlekit padded forward a few paw steps, sniffing the air deeply. "A few squirrels up north...a bird in the south...and...what *is* that?"

Thistlekit's fur stood on end and she turned to her sister.

"I'm not sure what it is, but it's big."

Rainkit blinked in confusion. "I will never fully understand how you *know* that."

Thistlekit purred and puffed out her chest.

"My senses have always been good. But I'm sure many of the warriors have even *stronger* senses."

Rainkit shook her head knowingly. "Your just being modest. You probably have the best sense of smell, sound and eyesight I've ever seen!"

Thistlekit's claws suddenly unsheathed, and she turned back to the direction of the weird scent.

The forest was quiet for a second, the only sound being the birds.

"Thistlekit?" Rainkit whispered.

"Hush." Thistlekit narrowed her eyes, trying to see deeper into the forest. "Its coming..." she mumbled. "Its coming straight at us!"

Suddenly, a huge red creature leaped from the brush, soaring over the two kits and landing behind them. Thistlekit whipped around to see a growling fox creeping slowly towards them in a hunting crouch.

"A fox..." Rainkit whimpered. "I've heard stories of these creatures...and I think we're going to be its next meal!"

Thistlekit shoved past her sister, puffing out her fur and arching her back in a hiss.

"Not if I can help it!" She shrieked.

"Thistlekit, don't!" Rainkit yowled.

The fox lunged at Thistlekit in one fluid motion, its teeth bared. Thistlekit leaped to the side, just in time as its huge paws landed on the ground. The fox seemed confused for a few moments, wondering why its small prey wasn't in its grasp.

In those few moments of distraction, Thistlekit leaped at the fox's shoulder, sending a blow to its side, with strength she didn't even know she had.

The fox shrieked in pain and stumbled back before yowling in anger, turning to the two kits again.

"I think you made it worse!" Rainkit hissed.

Thistlekit's eyes widened in fear, realizing her mistake.

"Run!" She yowled, turning away from the red beast and leaping over a large bush.

Rainkit followed with less ease, but managed to keep up. The two kits leaped through the dark pine forest, the fox following close behind and gaining.

Thistlekit narrowed her eyes, finding a small opening through a large thorn bush a mile away.

"There! Follow me!"

The two kits picked up speed, racing through the brush, leaping over rocks. A few moments passed before Thistlekit finally spotted the thorn bush. She could feel the hot breath of the fox on her heels, and jumped just in time as the beast snapped at her paws.

"Through there!" She yowled to Rainkit, diving through the small bushes hole.

Her sister quickly followed and the two kits scrambled through the bush, ignoring the tugs and pulls the thorns made at their fur. The

fox yowled in frustration, unable to follow its prey through the small hole.

After a few minutes of crawling, Thistlekit spotted the other end and quickly pulled herself out, followed by Rainkit.

The two kits breathed rapidly before collapsing to the ground.

"That was insane..." Rainkit meowed between breaths, trying to pull a few loose thorns from her fur. "Never again..."

Thistlekit sat, catching her breath, before pricking her ears. "The fox is gone...it gave up." She whispered in relief.

"Thank Starclan..." Rainkit huffed, wincing as she pulled another thorn out. She then looked up at Thistlekit with a glare. "This is why kits stay in the camp. We could have been killed!"

Thistlekit glared back and began to pull out thorns from her own fur. "But we weren't. I saved us. We're fine."

"Thats not good enough!" Rainkit stood up, her fur on end. "This was your fault! I knew I shouldn't have listened to you."

"I-

Thistlekit started before looking up suddenly. Rainkit sighed and dug her claws into the ground angrily. "What now?!"

Thistlekit looked around slowly before standing up, sniffing the air.

"Oh no..." She whispered.

"What?!" Rainkit hissed.

"Do you know where we are?!"

Rainkit looked around at the large grassy plains ahead of her, and glanced back at where they had came from, seeing the dark pine trees a few feet away.

"Um...no?"

Thistlekit growled in frustration. "Windclan territory!" Her eyes suddenly widened and she tried to yowl a warning but it was too late.

A small black she-cat leaped from over a bush, pouncing on Rainkit, pinning her down.

Thistlekit yowled before leaping at the black cat with huge force, sending the slightly bigger cat flying through the air, knocking it into a pine tree.

Thistlekit rolled to the ground, surprised at her own strength, before scrambling to her paws. Rainkit quickly got up and rushed to her sisters side.

"How did you do that?! First the fox, now this?" Rainkit hissed.

"I- I don't know..." Thistlekit whispered, turning her attention back to the black she-cat who was now standing, fur on end.

"Ravenpaw!" A large, bright orange tom leaped over the same bush the she-cat had come from and padded to her side.

Three more cats followed the tom, a tan colored she-cat, a smaller dark gray tabby tom, and a pure black tom.

Rainkit crouched behind Thistlekit, who puffed out her chest, gazing up at the five cats standing before her.
The orange tom glared down at the black she-cat, who coward below him.

"You know better than to attack a helpless kit!" The tom growled.

"They both seemed bigger when I first saw them!" The black she mumbled.

"Enough!" The tan she-cat padded forward, making the two kits shrink back. "It's okay. We won't hurt you." The she purred. "Are you hurt?"

"N-No..." Rainkit whispered from behind her sister.

The smaller dark gray tom padded over to the black she-cat, nudging her out of her defensive crouch, whispering to her softly. The pure black tom padded next to the tan she and glared down at the kits.

"What are two Shadowclan kits like yourselves doing in Windclan territory?"

Thistlekit swallowed her remaining fear and glared back. "We were chased by a fox into your territory. We're sorry if we disturbed you. I'm sure if you just let us back over the border we won't-

"I don't think so." The black tom hissed. "Two kits shouldn't even be outside the camp. Though you do look like you could be apprentices soon."

"We are." Thistlekit hissed back. "More than a quarter moon away, and we *will* be."

"Enough squabbling." The orange tom meowed, padding up to the tan she's shoulder. "We should take them back to camp. Falconstar will decide how we will handle this."

The five cats nodded in agreement.

"Waspclaw, take up the rear." The orange meowed to the black tom.

He nodded, giving Thistlekit one last glare before padding behind the two smaller cats.

"Lightberry, Branchpaw, Ravenpaw, surround the kits. I'll lead the way."

The cats took their places around the kits, pushing them forward as they followed the orange tom away from the pine trees.

"Are you sure this is necessary?" Thistlekit meowed desperately as she was forced forward. Ravenpaw snickered, causing Rainkit to shrink closer to her sister.

"Don't worry." The tan she-cat, who Thistlekit assumed was Lightberry, whispered. "Falconstar won't be too harsh. I hope..." She

whispered the last part low enough for no cat to hear, yet Thistlekit heard it loud and clear. She gulped in fear and gazed ahead, wishing she never left camp in the first place.

"How did you do it?" The dark gray apprentice whispered to Thistlekit from her left.

"What...?"

"You sent Ravenpaw flying! I've never seen such strength before. Let alone a kit with that much power!"

"I'm literally going to be an apprentice soon!" Thistlekit hissed, glaring at the tom.

"Yes I know that, but technically you're still a kit until then. I'm Branchpaw by the way."

"Shush!" Ravenpaw hissed from the kits right, glaring at the tom.

He rolled his eyes and nudged Thistlekit. "Seriously though, how did you do it?"

The kit glanced at her sister who was pressed against her in fear and sighed.
"I can't answer that. Because I don't even know myself."

Chapter Three

[image]

Breezekit glanced around the camp with narrowed eyes. His eyes landed on a small bush near the elders den, witch twitched slightly with movement.

"Where are you Sprucekit? I can hear your breathing..." the white kit snickered as he crouched towards the bush.

The bush moved again, making it clear he had found his target. Breezekit leaped through the bush, coming in contact with a small ball of light brown fur.

"Ha!" Breezekit sneered as he pinned down Sprucekit with a hard shove of his paws.

"Alright alright! You can get off now!" Sprucekit hissed as he shoved him off of him with a roll of his eyes. "I still think it's unfair. You *are* a quarter moon older than me."

"Nice pounce, Breezekit!" The two toms turned their heads to see a light gray she-kit skipping over.

"Go away, Featherkit." Breezekit hissed at his sister with a glare. "Nobody wants you here."

"I do!" Sprucekit purred as he shook leaves from his fur.

Breezekit rolled his eyes. "Of *course* you do."

Featherkit continued to pad over, oblivious to what her brother had said.

"What are you guys playing?" She asked.

"None of your business..." Breezekit hissed at the same time Sprucekit said "Catch the mouse!"

Featherkit glared at Breezekit. "Just because we're siblings, doesn't mean you have to be snarky with me all the time."

"Sometimes I wish Sprucekit was my sibling instead." Breezekit murmured.

Suddenly, the elders den rustled, and a tan colored tom padded out, followed by another grey and white tom.

"Would you three kits stop yapping? Some of us are trying to sleep!" The tan colored tom hissed.

The gray tom purred in amusement and sat down in front of the den. "Don't mind Mossyblaze. He's just being his usual cranky self. Plus, it's way past sunrise anyways, it's time to get moving!"

Mossyblaze rolled his half blind eyes. "Your only saying that, Fishpounce, because you joined the elders a few moons ago. Your not half as old as I am! I need my beauty sleep."

Breezekit resisted a snicker and nudged Sprucekit, who was holding in his own laughter.

"Is Darkheart *still* in there?" Fishpounce growled in frustration.

The two elder toms continued to bicker as Breezekit motioned for Sprucekit to follow and sighed as Featherkit followed as well.

The three kits padded over to the nursery to find two queens sitting at the entrance. The dark brown she-cat grabbed Sprucekit by the scruff as soon as he came in reach, beginning to groom him fiercely.

"Muddymist! Stop! I'm fine!" Sprucekit protested as Featherkit purred in amusement.

The pure white queen next to her shook her head and rapped her tail around her paws. "Muddymist, I'm sure he's fine." She purred.

Muddymist sighed and stopped the intense grooming. "Im sorry... you just ran off so quickly this morning that I forgot to give you your morning groom!"

Sprucekit sighed but didn't press the subject farther. He had grown used to the obsessive behavior from his mother, due to the fact his sister had died at birth.

"It's alright. These two could go for a groom as well." The white queen purred.

"Nope, we're good!" Breezekit meowed quickly, backing away from his mother. "Were going to be apprentices soon! We can groom ourselves."

The two queens purred and Muddymist turned to the other queen. "Anyways, Swanstrike..."

Breezekit turned away, uninterested in whatever conversation they were having, glancing at his sister and Sprucekit who were talking in hushed voices.

He rolled his eyes, used to their everyday flirting and padded towards the apprentice den. When he got there, he glanced inside to see it was surprisingly empty.

They must be on a patrol or something. He thought to himself.

He turned and sat in front of the den, sighing. He glanced around the quiet camp, gazing at a small group of warriors by the fresh-kill pile.

His father, a light gray tom, Smokeface, was speaking with another light brown tom, Duskcloud, and a silver she-cat, Silverleaf. He watched as his leader, Falconstar, padded from his den and sat down beside the group, shortly followed by the deputy of the clan, Ivyclaw.

Probably sending out hunting patrols.

Suddenly, a large group of cats padded from the entrance of the camp, Tigerwhisker being in the lead.

Falconstar and Ivyclaw padded to the group after a quick murmur to the group by the fresh-kill pile. Breezekit stood up, narrowing his eyes. He noticed Ravenpaw, Branchpaw and Lightberry were

surrounding two small figures in the middle of the group.

Breezekit padded forward, trying to get closer.

"Breezekit!" He turned to see his mother ushering him over to where she was sitting, and he rolled his eyes as he reluctantly complied.

He sighed as he sat by his mother who nodded in approval. Featherkit joined them with Sprucekit and flicked her tail curiously. "What do you think is going on?"
"It seems like two kits from Shadowclan have been brought here..." Swanstrike mumbled.

Breezekit gazed at his mother in surprise. "How do you know?"

"I can smell their terrible scent from here." She growled.

Featherkit glanced at her mothers words in surprise before turning away from the scene and padding away, Sprucekit following close behind.

Breezekit pricked his ears, wishing he could hear what the group was saying.

Falconstar was speaking with Tigerwhisker, glancing at the two huddled kits. The light gray kit stood tall above the other kit, seeming to hold her own as she spoke to the leader. Something the kit said made the leaders eyes widen.

Falconstar then turned to Ivyclaw, whispering something to her, before ordering something to Lightberry. The tan she-cat nodded before ushering the two kits towards the medicine den. Falconstar then said something to the rest of the group, then followed Lightberry. The group dispersed.

Breezekit watched Ravenpaw and Branchpaw pad towards the apprentice den and he glanced at Swanstrike, who seemed distracted at something Muddymist was saying.

He took that opportunity by sprinting towards Ravenpaw with quick, long strides.

"Woah!" Ravenpaw reared back as Breezekit came to a halt in front of her, his tail high.

"What was that about? Who are those kits? Why are they here?" Breezekit meowed.

"Slow down!" Branchpaw shook his head in amusement. "We're not really supposed to talk about it. Especially to a *kit*."

"Oh come on!" Breezekit begged. "You both know I'm going to become an apprentice any day now! I'm *barley* even a kit."

The two apprentices glanced at each other with worried looks.

"Okay yeah we really shouldn't talk about this with you." Ravenpaw glared at Branchpaw threateningly. "Its not our place."

Breezekit gazed at the cats in confusion at their sudden tension.

"Wha-

"Okay see ya, Breezekit. We're gonna take a quick nap. We woke up pretty early this morning." Ravenpaw meowed quickly, padding past Breezekit, followed by Branchpaw, who avoided his gaze. Breezekit watched the apprentices go in confusion.

What was that about?

Suddenly, Lightberry emerged from the medicine den across the camp, followed by the kits. She murmured something to Tigerwhisker, who nodded and padded behind the kits as they walked out of the camp.

Breezekit watched them go, before glancing back at the medicine den to see Falconstar standing at the entrance, staring right at him.

Chapter Four

[image]

"HELP ME!!!"

Fernkit's eyes whipped open and she yowled in fear. Her heart was pounding in her chest as the memory of her dream replayed in her mind.

Water... and it was cold... that's all I can remember. She thought.

But she could remember the terror perfectly clear. Fernkit took a long, deep breath and looked around the empty nursery.

It must be past sunrise...

She stumbled to her paws and stretched, before padding out of the den and into the soft sunlight of the Riverclan camp.

She sat down and gazed around, trying to get her mind off of her unsettling dream.

Her two siblings, Mudkit and Briarkit, were sitting with her mother and father, Sparrowheart and Cottonclaw, by the warriors den.

Riverclan's medicine cat, Pearlfeather, was sorting through some herbs outside her den. While a group of warriors, Rainfall, Treeleap, Fishpelt, and Sagebreeze, talked amongst themselves by the fresh kill pile.

Fernkit closed her eyes and breathed in the fresh new leaf air, glad to be clearing her mind. The lovely silence was broken, as small paw steps sounded in front of her.

Fernkit opened her eyes to see Mudkit and Briarkit bounding towards her.

"Morning sleepyhead!" Briarkit meowed as she reached her sister.

"We didn't want to wake you. You looked so peaceful!" Mudkit chimed in.

Well my dream certainly wasn't... Fernkit thought.

"Sparrowheart is finally letting us explore along the stream outside of camp! Cottonclaw convinced her by promising to watch us." Mudkit purred. "Along with the fact that we're going to be apprentices in five sunrises." He added.

Fernkit stood up in excitement, her dream leaving her mind.

"Thats great! Let's go then!" She raced over to where Cottonclaw and Sparrowheart were sitting, her siblings close behind.

"Ready?" Cottonclaw purred as the three kits trampled to a stop in front of him.

"Now hold on." Sparrowheart meowed worriedly. "Promise me you'll keep a good eye on them."

Cottonclaw nodded and licked her ears affectionately. "I promise. They'll be fine."

The queen nodded slowly, then flicked her tail.

"Come on!" Mudkit yowled in excitement as he bounded towards the camps entrance. Fernkit leaped after him, dodging warriors and apprentices as they walked by.

She came to a stop next to her brother as he peered into the stream surrounding the outside of camp. Briarkit padded up to them, followed by Cottonclaw.

"This way." Cottonclaw purred as he began to walk along the side of the stream.

The three kits followed close behind in wonder, sniffing the air and leaping over rocks.

Fernkit stopped and gazed into the water, seeing her reflection.

"Look at that log in the middle of the stream!" Mudkit was behind her and staring at a small looking log, stuck in between a few rocks in the water.

"I bet if I leaped high enough, I could get onto it." He meowed mischievously.

"Don't even think about it." Fernkit hissed quietly, glancing at Cottonclaw who was awhile away, speaking with Briarkit as they both gazed into the stream.

Fernkit guessed he was talking about ways to catch a fish, due to the fact he kept swinging his paw into the water in demonstration.

"Maybe if I just get a running start." Mudkit huffed, as he backed away from the stream, crouching into a springing stance.

"Mudkit I swear to Starclan if you jump-

The dark brown kit sprung forward, bounding towards the edge of the water before leaping towards the log. He landed on the wood with a soft "splat", making it creak slightly. Fernkit braced for it to break under his weight, but it never did.

"Ha!" Mudkit mocked. "I am the highest leaper in all the clans!"

Fernkit let out the breath she was holding in and shook her head.

"Mousebrain..."

She turned to see Cottonclaw, still in a deep conversation with Briarkit, his back to them.

At least he didn't see. I certainly don't want Mudkit ruining our chance of doing this again. If Sparrowheart ever knew-

Her thoughts were interrupted as a loud crack sounded, along with a shriek. She whipped around to see Mudkit splashing around in the water, the log splintered.

"I can't-
Mudkit yowled before his head went under.

"Swim!"

"Mudkit!" Fernkit yowled, looking around for Cottonclaw and Briarkit, but they were suddenly nowhere to be seen.

"HELP ME!!!" Mudkit shrieked as he begun to drift with the current.

Fernkits eyes widened as familiarity crept over her.

My dream...

She shook her head and turned back to Mudkit who was now a few feet away. She bounded along the edge of the stream as she catched up to him, his head barley staying above the surface.

"Hold on, Mudkit!" She shrieked. She gazed ahead as the stream turned around the side of the camp and gasped as she saw Cottonclaw and Briarkit in the distance. Fernkit turned her attention back to Mudkit but screeched to a stop. The brown kit was gone.

He must have gone under! She thought in terror, shaking in fear.

She glanced at where her sister and father were standing, who we're now looking at her in confusion.

Theres no time. Mudkit needs me.

She turned her attention back to the stream, and took a deep breath in, before leaping into the water.

It was cold and slightly dark as the she-kit swam with the current, searching for brown fur.

Her legs seemed to be naturally working in the water, and it was surprisingly easy. Suddenly, she caught sight of dark brown fur sinking slowly to the bottom of the stream in front of her.

Mudkit was being drifted with the current, his eyes closed.

Fernkit swam faster, pumping her legs underneath her, not even thinking about getting air. Her lungs seemed to be filled with

gallons of it. She reached her brother in no time at all and sunk her teeth into his scruff, kicking off of the stream floor towards the surface.

The kit's heads emerged from the water, Fernkit not even needing a breath of air. She resisted the current and swam with speed and agility to the edge of the stream, where Cottonclaw and Briarkit were yowling and shrieking from the side.

"Oh thank Starclan!" Cottonclaw meowed in despair.

Fernkit reached the side, and with all her strength, swung Mudkit's limp body over the edge and onto solid ground. She then scrambled up herself with ease.

Cottonclaw rushed to Mudkit's side, licking the small kit fiercely.

"Fernkit!" Briarkit bounded over to her and nudged her in concern. "Are you alright?! All we saw was you leaping into the stream like a crazy cat!"

Fernkit nodded, no energy lost from the swim, and gazed at Mudkit in concern.

"I'm fine. This dumb mousebrain decided to leap onto a log, witch broke under his weight."

Mudkit's eyes suddenly snapped open and he coughed up some water.

"Thank Starclan!" Cottonclaw said again. "What were you *thinking?!"*

Mudkit sighed, his breathing rapid, before closing his eyes again.

"We need to bring him to Pearfeather." Cottonclaw meowed, carefully picking Mudkit up by his scruff.

Fernkit followed her father with Brairkit without question, silently deep in thought.

My dream...it was exactly like what just happened. That scream... it was Mudkit.

"Fernkit? Are you even listening to me?"

"Huh?" Fernkit looked at her sister as they continued to pad after their father.

"I said, I know Cottonclaw doesn't seem too concerned about you, but it seems like he doesn't need too."

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean is you swam like an otter! I know Riverclan is known for their swimming skills, but that was just... incredible! I mean you were under for what seemed like moons! And the way you just jumped after Mudkit-

Briarkits rambling faded to the back of Fernkits mind, as her thoughts went back to her dream. Her dream that felt too real.

Her dream that ended up *actually happening.*

Chapter Five

[image]

Thistlekit meowed in excitement as the sun finally reached sun high. The kit was sitting outside the nursery, anxiously waiting.

Riverpebble and Rainkit padded out of the den, followed slowly by Peachpelt, her belly rounder then Thistlekit remembered. For the she-cat was expecting kits in a few moons.

"I see your exited." Riverpebble purred, licking the top of Thistekit's head.

She pawed her mothers face away. "Stop that! I'm going to be an apprentice any moment now! I can groom myself!"

The gray queen purred and glanced at Peachpelt in amusement. "Oh I know. But you should look nice for the ceremony. I already did Rainkit."

Rainkit sighed. "I still can't believe Bearstar is even letting us become apprentices after only a few sunrises ago we were in Winclan camp."

Thistlekit nudged her sister and lowered her voice. "And we told him it was an *accident.* So stop running your little mouth!"

Rainkit rolled her eyes before sitting next the their mother.

"It is sun high." Peachpelt meowed. "Bearstar should be-

Just then, Bearstar and Fangtooth, the deputy, padded out of the leaders den.

Thistlekit flicked her tail back and forth in excitement and she shuffled her paws in anticipation.

Bearstar padded over to the the Clanrock and climbed the large

stone, before resting at the top. Fangtooth took his place beside the rock and glanced up at his leader, nodding.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey join here beneath the Clanrock for a meeting!" Bearstar yowled.

Warriors and apprentices stopped what they were doing, turning towards their leaders call.

Raspberrywhisper padded from her den, sitting at the entrance. As cats began to gather around the rock, Riverpebble nudged Rainkit and Thistlekit forward, leading them towards the front of the crowd.

Thistekit glanced at Rainkit, who looked more nervous than she had ever seen her. She nudged her gently.

"Hey. It's going to be okay. We're going to be great apprentices." Thistlekit whispered.

Rainkit nodded to her sister, yet her nerves didn't seem to vanish. The kits then reached the rock, their leader gazing down at them.

"Rainkit. Thistlekit. Please step forward." Bearstar meowed.

The two kits stepped forward, away from their mother, who gazed at them with proud eyes.

"You both have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior names, you both shall be known as Rainpaw and Thistlepaw."

His eyes landed on Rainpaw.

"Rainpaw, your mentor will be Darkpool."

Darkpool stood up from beside his mate Mistyfur, and padded over. He stopped in front of Rainpaw who was slightly shaking.

"I hope you're ready to work hard." The dark gray tom meowed.

She nodded and hesitantly touched her nose to his before he took

his place beside her.

Bearstar's gaze shifted and he meowed loudly.

"Thistlepaw, your mentor will be Blazepelt."

The orange tom who sat towards the back of the crowd stood up slowly, padding over.

Thistlepaw purred with excitement as she turned towards her mentor.

"I won't let you down." She meowed with determination.

Blazepelt raised an eyebrow before touching his nose to hers and taking his seat beside her.

"I'm trusting both of these warriors will pass down all they know to you." Bearstar meowed, nodding to both mentors.

"Rainpaw! Thistlepaw!" The clan chanted as the leader concluded the ceremony.

"Clan dismissed." The leader yowled as the chants died down.

The cats began to disperse, heading back to their dens or back out on patrols.

Thistlepaw turned towards her mentor but was surprised to see he was gone. She looked around and spotted him padding towards the fresh kill pile.

She sprinted after him, skidding to a halt in front of him.

"So what's first? Hunting lessons? Battle training? Patrols?" She meowed in excitement.

Blazepelt sat down next to Roseheart, digging around the pile for a mouse.

"Not quite yet. Today, you're going to be cleaning the elders den."

Thistlepaw stepped back in surprise. "Cleaning the *elders* den?!"

Roseheart purred in amusement. "It is one of the key responsibilities of being an apprentice." She meowed.

"But I'm supposed to be learning how to hunt and protect this clan! Not learning how to properly clean a musty old elders den!" Thistlepaw whined.

"Helping and taking care of this clan is what being a warrior is about." Blazepelt interrupted. "Being a warrior isn't all about fighting and who can catch the most prey. And I think that's the first lesson you should learn. Which is exactly why you will be cleaning the elders den today."

Thistlepaw sighed and glared at her paws.

"Fine." She mumbled as she padded towards the elders den sorrowfully.

Pumkinpelt, Leafwhisker, and Frogmoss were sitting outside the den, softly engaged in a conversation.

"Thistlepaw! How does it feel to be an apprentice?" Leafwhisker purred as she approached the elders.

"It's okay, I guess." Thistlepaw meowed.

"I'm guessing by your mood that you're here to clean our den?" Frogmoss meowed in amusement.

The apprentice nodded and the three cats laughed.

"Blazepelt definitely knows what he's doing." Pumpkinpelt purred.

"Really? Cause it seems to me like I'm doing a whole lot of nothing." Thistlepaw hissed through her teeth.

"Oh, don't start that." Frogmoss rolled his eyes. "You apprentices almost always seem to start off like this."

Thistlepaw huffed in frustration before shoving past the elders and into the den.

"Give her time." Leafwhisker whispered, thinking the apprentice couldn't hear, which she easily could. "She might be the one. You never know."

Thistlepaw perked her ears at this, and she listened while starting to clean out the nests.

"Nah. I'm betting on the other one. Rainpaw." Frogmoss hissed lowly. "She seems to have a sense of patience at least."

"Yes, but Thistlepaw has more confidence and bravery. That could come in handy in some cases." Pumkinpelt meowed back.

What are they talking about...? Thistlepaw thought confusedly.

"Enough talk of this." Leafwhisker huffed. "We shouldn't be discussing this topic at all. Especially with one of them so near."

With that, the whispering stopped.

Thistlepaw continued working, waiting for the elders to continue, hoping to figure out what they were talking about.

Awhile passed until Frogmoss started a new discussion about the new leaf weather.

Thistlepaw sighed and gritted her teeth.

What did they mean when they said Rainpaw or I could be the one? She thought to herself. *What is every cat hiding from us?*

~

Thistlepaw finally finished as the sun began to set. She dragged her small bundle of dirty nest debris, passing the elders as they were padding into the den.

"Thanks Thistlepaw." Leafwhisker meowed as she passed her.

Thistlepaw nodded in respones, dragging the bundle towards the entrance of the camp.

With a sniff and a flick of her ears, she sensed Rainpaw sprinting over to her from behind her.

"There you are!" She huffed as she padded beside her. "I had the most eventful day! Darkpool taught me a ton of hunting crouches and pouncing techniques! I didn't get to actually hunt, but it was still really fun! Darkpool is kinda scary and he can be harsh at times but I think that's good for me! I think he's going to make me really tough and strong and-

Thistlepaw dropped the bundle behind a rock a few feet outside of camp with a loud thump. "Good for you, Rainpaw." She meowed through gritted teeth.

"Oh. I'm talking a lot aren't I? Sorry I'm just really exited! Well, what did you do today? I bet it was even better than what I did."

"Oh my day was just *amazing*." Thistlepaw hissed. "I had *so* much fun."

Rainpaw purred, oblivious to her sisters bad mood. "Thats great! I'm so exited for tomorrow. Maybe we will get to hunt together or something!"

Rainpaw continued to ramble on as the two apprentices made their way to the fresh kill pile. Lillypaw, Oceanpaw, and Dovepaw sat around the pile and greeted them with a purr.

"Well look who it is. Our new den mates." Oceanpaw meowed, nudging a crow over to them.

"Thanks!" Rainpaw purred back before digging into the crow, her nerves obviously gone.

"I see you got Darkpool as your mentor, Rainpaw." Dovepaw meowed. "Don't worry. Our father can be a little harsh at times when it comes to mentoring, but he means well."

Thistlepaw sighed and dug out a small mouse from the pile. "How bout you Thistlepaw? How you finding Blazepelt as a mentor?" Lillypaw purred.

Thistlepaw glanced up from her already finished mouse. "It's great." She forced out with a smile.

The apprentices continued their conversation and Thistlepaw sighed, getting up and heading towards the apprentices den.

Before she could enter the den, Blazepelt padded over, stepping in front of her.

"Thank you for cleaning the elders den today. It looks great."

Thistlepaw perked her ears. "Does this mean we're going to start real training tomorrow?" She purred hopefully.

Blazepelt's domineer changed and his face fell. "Actually, as I was checking the elders den, I overheard Frogmoss saying he's been feeling very itchy recently. Tomorrow you're going to check him for ticks." He meowed.

"But- Thistlepaw started.

"You better start early or I'll be sure to recommend that Oceanpaw should throw some nettle into your nest. She's known for throwing some tricks at other apprentices." He purred before padding off.

Thistlepaw growled, digging her claws deep into the soil before taking a deep breath and padding into the den.
~
"I mean seriously! When will I ever start actually *training*?" Thistlepaw meowed as she rubbed her mouse bile covered paw over Frogmoss's fur. "This smells like mouse dung by the way."

It was the day after her apprentice ceremony and it was almost sun high. Thistlepaw had woken up much earlier and retrieved the mouse bile from the medicine den, deciding not to press Blazepelt's threat.

"A little lower..." Frogmoss meowed.

Thistlepaw rolled her eyes, moving her paw a little lower.

"There!" Frogmoss yowled.

Thistlepaw peered through the elders mossy, gray colored fur. She spotted the tick and gently hooked her claw around it, pulling it

out. She flung the bug onto the ground before smushing it with her paw, resisting a gag.

"Much better..." Frogmoss purred.

"Any more itches?"

"Nope."

"Thank Starclan." Thistlepaw meowed to herself.

"Maybe Blazepelt is waiting for you to realize that this *is* apart of your training." Leafwhisker meowed from next to her, replying to her question.

"How is pulling ticks out of elders fur apart of training?" Thistlepaw huffed.

"Well not exactly that, but the lesson behind it."

"Whats that supposed to mean?"

Leafwhisker sighed. "What I mean, is maybe he's trying to teach you something he thinks you need to value a little more than fighting and hunting."

"Rainpaw is out hunting right now after only one day of training!" Thistlepaw whined.

"Maybe that's because she's less of a whiner." Frogmoss meowed, rolling his eyes.

"Not exactly." Leafwhisker purred in amusement. "But perhaps because your sister already knows patience and value." Thistlepaw couldn't help but glare.

"Do you know how leaders choose mentors for apprentices?" Leafwhisker meowed steadily. "They choose a cat who can not only make an apprentice into a great warrior, but who can guide them into being a wise and respectable cat."

Thistlepaw's gaze softened as she considered the elders words.

"Blazepelt saw something in you. Perhaps impatience. Or over eagerness. But I think you need to learn something from this."

Thistlepaw nodded slowly. "I think I understand now." She jumped to her paws and looked around the camp for her mentor before spotting him in front of the warriors den.

"Thanks Leafwhisker!" She meowed as she sprinted over to him.

The orange tom gazed at the apprentice in surprise as she screeched to a halt in front of him.

"I think I understand." Thistlepaw repeated.

Blazepelt raised an eyebrow and nodded for her to continue.

"I think I now realize the importance of the process of becoming a warrior. Although it's important to learn skills such as hunting and fighting, it's more important to learn to be patient. My sister...she wasn't as eager as I was to become an apprentice. And that made her probably easier to work with than I would have been if I started right away."

Blazepelt nodded slowly and purred. "Well done. You've learned your very first lesson."

"Well I had a little help." Thistlepaw purred, glancing at the elders den.

"Well then, your hunting training begins tomorrow. I expect to see you at the camp entrance before sun rise."

Thistlepaw purred. "Oh, I will be."

Chapter Six

[image]

Brackenpaw crouched low to the ground, his belly fur brushing the grass beneath him.

"Very good." Owlwhisker meowed from beside the apprentice.

Brackenpaw sat up and gazed up at his mentor, his mind elsewhere as he nodded. Owlwhisker raised an eyebrow and turned, flicking his tail for Brackenpaw to follow.

"Something on your mind?" The older, dark brown tom asked.

Brackenpaw gazed at his paws as he followed him.

The silence stretched on, until his mentor turned on him with a flick of his ears.

"You've been an official apprentice for a couple of sunrises. Maybe it's time you try and catch some real prey."

Brackenpaw perked up at the sound of that and nodded in determination.

Owlwhisker huffed and sniffed deeply. "Tell me, what do you smell?"

Brackenpaw closed his eyes and inhaled. "North. A few...mice. And...birds maybe? Up in the trees?"

Owlwhisker purred. "Very good. You're getting better at this. Now go north and try to catch something. I won't help you or give you any advice. I want to see how well you use what you already know."

Brackenpaw nodded and begun to pad north.

"Camp is close by so I'll wait for you there." Owlwhisker meowed before turning and padding back to camp.

Brackenpaw continued north, sniffing the air every other paw step. He suddenly came to an abrupt stop as a rustle above him sounded from a tree. He slowly looked up to see a small bird perched on a branch a few feet above his head.

Brackenpaw crouched slowly, making sure he didn't make a sound.

He knew there wasn't a chance he could jump high enough to swat the bird down from where it was perched, but something inside him couldn't resist the urge to try.

Before the bird could have a chance to fly away, Brackenpaw pushed off with his hind legs, leaping upward as high as he could.

He yowled in surprise at how high he had reached as he swatted the bird down from the tree. He landed on the ground with ease and glanced around for the bird. The small creature was dead a few feet away, blood gently oozing from its side.

Brackenpaw purred in triumph, picking the bird up with his mouth, padding back towards camp.

As he padded through the entrance, he glanced around for his mentor. His eyes landed on Silverlilly, who was talking happily with a few other warriors.

After him and his siblings became apprentices, she joyfully became a warrior once again. He glared at his paws as he padded towards the fresh kill pile. The haunted thought that his kin might not actually be his kin, still ran through his head every minute of every day.

He reached the pile and dropped his kill.

"Brackenpaw!"

He turned to see Snowypaw running towards him. As the gray apprentice reached him, out of breath, he purred happily.

"Hawkfang just taught me some battle moves, and you have know idea how fun it was! He even came at me once and pinned me down in like, two seconds, but it was so cool!"

Brackenpaw rolled his eyes.

"Yes, Snowypaw, I know. I literally went battle training last sun high."

Snowypaw glared and flicked his tail in annoyance.

"No need to be so stingy about it. Ever since we became apprentices you've been acting really weird. I haven't seen you talk to Silverlilly since the ceremony. And you barley speak with me unless I come to you first."

Brackenpaw turned away, scanning the camp for his mentor, trying not to look the gray apprentice in the eyes.

"Your being over dramatic. I'm fine."

Snowypaw sighed and padded off.

Brackenpaw flicked his tail back and forth, wishing things were back to the way they were. Where he didn't overhear that meeting when he was a kit. That he didn't suspect that his kin he grew up with wasn't his real kin. But all the facts point to one thing. Silverlilly lied to him his entire life. They all did.

But why? He thought to himself. *Why lie? Why not just tell me? Why all the secrecy?*

He sighed as Owlwhisker padded up to him from behind, and nudged him with his shoulder.

"Nice catch." He meowed, gazing at the bird on top of the pile. "I'm assuming that's yours?"

Brackenpaw nodded silently. Owlwhisker raised an eyebrow at the apprentices sudden low mood.

"Is everything okay?"

Brackenpaw glanced up at his mentor longingly. He wanted to tell him. Tell him his suspicions. But he couldn't do it.
Who says Owlwhisker won't just lie to him like everyone else is?

"I'm fine." Brackenpaw mumbled. "Are we done with training for the day?"

Owlwhisker nodded slowly. "Yes, that's fine..."

With that, Brackenpaw turned and padded towards the apprentice den. He turned and sat outside the entrance, not feeling tired enough to sleep. He gazed around the camp lazily until his eyes landed on Owlwhisker and Hawkfang who were mumbling to Amberstar outside her den.

They glanced around every now and then, until they turned to Autumnleaf who padded into camp with Pebblepaw at her side.

Autumnleaf saw the three cats huddled together, mumbled something to Pebblepaw, and padded over to them. The group then walked into the leaders den, Owlwhiskers eyes meeting Brackenpaws before following them inside.

Pebblepaw padded up to him and nudged him as she sat next to him.

"Hows life, Brackenpaw?" She teased.

"Did you see that?" He asked, ignoring the question.

"See what?"

"All of our mentors just went into Amberstars den. It seems serious."

Pebblepaw rolled her eyes. "There you go again with your stupid assumptions."

Brackenpaw growled at the gray she-cat. "There *you* go again with your blindness to what's really going on. Our mentors aren't telling us something."

Pebblepaw sighed and padded into the apprentices den.

"You do you, Brackenpaw."

He unsheathed his claws and dug them deep into the soil.

They're all blind. Something is going on. I can feel it.

He pinned his ears and narrowed his eyes at the leaders den.

I just need to prove it.

Chapter Seven

[image]

The wind gently blew through Breezepaw's white and gray fur. The apprentice unsheathed his claws in anticipation as he waited for Featherpaw.

He glanced at the two cats beside him, his mentor Waspclaw, and Featherpaw's mentor, Quietwave.

Breezepaw sighed.

"Why are we doing this again? We've only been apprentices for a few sunrises. Why are we already doing an assessment?"

Waspclaw bared his teeth at the apprentice.

"We've been over this. This is for me and Quietwave to see how fast you are catching on to what we've taught you. Now stop asking questions!"

The black tom turned and stared straight ahead, looking out at the long grassy field. Breezepaw huffed and glared at his paws.

We haven't even learned simple battle moves yet. We've been spending so much time on hunting techniques. I want to fight!

Quietwave leaned over to Breezepaw and whispered in his ear.

"Don't worry. We know what we're doing. Just trust us."

Breezepaw glanced up at the gray she-cat with a raised eyebrow but she was already gazing out at the field as if she had said nothing.

She made that sound like what they're doing in our training is bigger than we thought.

Waspclaw sighed and flicked his ear.

"She should be back by now."

Quietwave narrowed her eyes slightly.

"Maybe she can't find a scent."

"Its new leaf! There should be prey everywhere."

Suddenly the long grass in front of the cats twitched, and a small, light gray cat appeared, dragging a large rabbit in her jaws.

"Featherpaw!" Quietwave meowed surprisingly.

Featherpaw dropped her kill with a loud thump and gazed up at her mentor in triumph.

"Sorry I took so long! I had to drag this thing from the shadow clan border line!"

Waspclaw raised an eyebrow at the limp rabbit.

"Thats... impressive for a newly made apprentice."

The tom glanced at Quietwave. The she-cat shrugged in response before quickly turning to Breezepaw.

"Alright Breezepaw, your turn. All you have to do is-

"Find prey as fast as you can and bring it back here, I know, I know." Breezepaw interrupted.

The she-cat nodded.

"Featherpaw and I should take this back to camp."

Waspclaw nodded and flicked his tail at Breezepaw dismissively. Taking that as a sign, Breezepaw padded back through the grass where Featherpaw had emerged. He began to walk north, hoping to find an even better catch. Deep down he knew that most likely wouldn't happen.

Theres no way another rabbit that size is somewhere out here.

He opened his jaws and inhaled deeply, trying to pick up a scent. He padded aimlessly, mouth open, hoping to find something.

After awhile of pointless walking, Breezepaw glanced up at the sky, sighing as the sun began too slowly go down.

It's going to be moon high before I find anything. He thought defeatedly.

Suddenly, a scent of rabbit hit his nose and the apprentice pricked his ears. He then crouched low to the ground, not taking any risks, as he slowly followed the scent.

After a few moments of creeping slowly forward, Breezepaw spotted the rabbit grazing a dandelion near a small bush.

That bush will be its escape plan as soon as it sees me. Breezepaw thought.

Maybe if I creep through the bush...no that wouldn't work, I'm too big. Im not a kit anymore. He joked to himself. *But maybe if I attack quickly and aim for running at the side of the bush, blocking its escape...I might be able to chase it down.*

Breezepaw shuffled his paws quietly, silently thinking there was no way he could be fast enough to get to the side of the bush before the rabbit dived into it.

It's worth a try. I've already been out here way longer then Featherpaw was.

Breezepaw gathered his weight into his back legs, readying himself to push himself off into a fast sprint.

Hopefully Waspclaw won't bite my tail off for taking this long and coming back with nothing.

He shook his head, clearing his mind, focusing on the rabbit intently.

It's now or never.

Breezepaw then pushed off, soaring over the ground with lightning speed. Before he knew it, the rabbit was under him, squirming underneath him. Not only had he reached the bush in time, but he had slid over the rabbit so fast that the thing didn't realize what was happening until it was too late.

Breezepaw huffed in amazement and bit quickly into the rabbits throat.

That was... insane! He thought as blood dripped from his mouth. *Wait till Waspclaw hears this!*

He grasped the limp rabbit in his jaws, carrying it back to the clearing.
~
Breezepaw emerged from the tall grass to find Waspclaw sitting impatiently.

"Finally." The black tom growled. He glanced at the rabbit in the apprentices jaws and sighed.

"It took you even longer than Featherpaw to find some prey, and you come back with that?"

Breezepaw dropped his kill and flicked his tail back in forth in excitement.

"I know, but you should have seen it! I pounced on it in like, two seconds! I was so fast! I don't even know how I-

"Enough, Breezepaw." Waspclaw hissed. "I've heard quite enough of this foolishness."

Breezepaw tilted his head in confusion.

"But I-

Waspclaw bared his teeth and leaned his head down so he was face to face with his apprentice.

"You need to learn something. Grow up. Using excuses won't get you anywhere. If you want to be a warrior one day, you can't just

slack off. Which means, no coming back from a hunting assessment with anything less than your sister. And when we begin fighting lessons, you must win every fight that is thrown your way. You must do better."

Breezepaw gazed at his paws in silence.

Waspclaw is right. I must do better. I must be better than Featherpaw. Which means being better than everyone.

Suddenly, the grass swayed behind them, and a tortoiseshell she-cat jumped through.

"Aspenberry?" Waspclaw meowed.

The she-cats eyes widened at the limp rabbit by Breezepaw's feet and she quickly swatted it away.

"Have you tasted any of its blood?" She meowed in a worried tone.

Waspclaw stood up and looked the cat up and down. "What are you talking about?"

"Have you?!" She yowled at Breezepaw, ignoring his mentor.

"No!" Breezepaw meowed in surprise.

"Good..." The she sighed and turned to Waspclaw.

"Mossyblaze is sick. A few minutes after he ate Featherpaw's rabbit that she brought back, he fell to his side, foam spilling from his mouth. Arcticwind believes that it's poisoning."

Breezepaw's eyes widened and glanced at the rabbit a few feet away.

"Which means the rabbit most likely ate poison..." Waspclaw meowed slowly.

"Yes. We can't be sure that other prey hasn't ingested it as well." Aspenberry flicked her tail anxiously.

"What should we do with this then?" Breezepaw motioned to the body.

"Bury it." Aspenberry meowed and begun to dig quickly on the spot. "Falconstar's orders."
The two cats nodded and joined in with the digging.

As soon as the hole was deep enough, Waspclaw flung the rabbit inside and covered it over with dirt.

"We should head back to camp." Aspenberry sighed, shaking out her fur. "See how Mossyblaze is holding up."

The three cats padded quickly back to camp in silence.

As they padded through the entrance, Aspenberry gasped as they spotted a limp body laying in front of the Highrock.

Cats from the camp sat silently around it.

"Mossyblaze..." Breezepaw whispered.

The three cats padded quickly over to the group, pushing their way to the front.

Arcticwind, Falconstar, and Ivyclaw sat closest to the limp body. Arcticwind stared blankly ahead but flicked her ear at the approaching cats.
"Was the extra kill buried?" She asked.

"Yes..." Aspenberry nodded as she gazed at the limp cat in shock.

Fadepaw, the medicine cat apprentice, padded up the the huddled group.
"We couldn't save him...we tried giving him yarrow to throw up the toxins, but he's a very old cat. The poison reached his heart too quickly."

Arcticwind turned to her apprentice, nudging her gently.
"We did all we could..."

"What matters now, is making sure no other cats eat until we figure

out wether any other prey is intoxicated or not." Falconstar meowed silently. "But first, we must pay our respects..."

Breezepaw crouched low to the ground and pressed his nose gently to Mossyblaze's tan colored fur.
"May you walk peacefully with Starclan..." He mumbled.

He stood up and padded to the back of the group, leaving his mentor to pay his own respects. He looked around, hoping to find Featherpaw.

"She's in the apprentices den."

Breezepaw whipped around to find Branchpaw and Ravenpaw behind him.

"She won't come out..." Branchpaw meowed.

"She blames herself pretty badly." Ravenpaw huffed.

Breezepaw turned away from the apprentices, padding quickly to the apprentices den.
He stepped into the now dark den and blinked in surprise. Featherpaw was curled up in the back, her head on her paws.

"Featherpaw."

She sat up in surprise, turning and sighing as she noticed who it was.
"Go away, Breezepaw. I don't feel like talking."

"It wasn't your fault. How should you have known the rabbit was poisoned?"
Featherpaw unsheathed her claws and bared her teeth at her brother.

"It doesn't matter! I gave that rabbit to Mossyblaze! Quietwave had even suggested that I eat it as a reward for my good catch! But no. I just had to give it to an elder! It should have been me, Breezepaw! I might have even survived. And no cat would be dead. But he's gone..." She then turned and stared at the den wall.

Breezepaw stood in silence, unsure what to say. He had never seen his sister that angry before.
"Featherpaw...you couldn't have known. You were trying to do something nice."

The gray she-cat scoffed.

"Mossyblaze wouldn't have wanted you to sit in here and sulk like this. I'm sure he would have wanted you to get off your tail and give him a proper burial."

Featherpaw turned and glanced at her brother with sad eyes.
"But that won't change what has happened. Nothing will."

Breezepaw flicked his tail back in forth.
"Maybe not. But if you want to change something, maybe start by helping to make sure this never happens again."

Featherpaw nodded slowly, standing up and padding over to her brother.
"Your right." She purred silently.

"Let all cats old enough to run the moor, gather around the Tallrock for a clan meeting!" Falconstar yowled from outside the den.

The two apprentices rushed outside, pushing their way to the front of the group.

The rest of the elders had now joined Ivyclaw, Arcticwind, and Fadepaw beside Mossyblaze's body.

Breezepaw sat down beside his sister, nudging her gently as she gazed sadly at the dead elder.
The cats looked up at their leader who sat on the top of the Tallrock, the sun fully setting, casting a shadow to fall over the camp.

"Tonight, we mourn over the loss of Mossyblaze. A brave, smart, and loyal cat. He will be forever missed. May he walk with Starclan." Falconstar meowed.

The cats dipped their heads in respect.

"But we must make sure this never occurs again." The leader continued. "Featherpaw."

Featherpaw gazed up at her leader in surprise.

"Before you killed it, did the rabbit give off any signs that were unusual?"

Featherpaw thought for a moment then nodded slowly.

"I...I didn't think of it that much in the moment, but it was very easy to catch. Most likely due to the fact that it was constantly staggering and seemed very disoriented." She meowed guiltily.

Falconstar nodded. "If you go out hunting, keep a look out for these signs." He meowed to the rest of the group.

"Also, if you're unsure or not if your prey has those symptoms, look into their eyes." Arcticwind added. "When an animal has ingested poison, their pupils are very dilated."

The cats nodded, murmuring to themselves lowly.

"Tonight, we will remember Mossyblaze and everything he did for Windclan." Falconstar yowled. "He will not be forgotten."

Featherpaw sighed. "I saw that the rabbit seemed off..." She whispered.

Breezepaw shook his head. "Featherpaw, enough. You can't change what has happened."

The she-cat nodded "I know, I know..." She leaned against his shoulder and scooted closer.

"Everything is changing...I can feel it." She mumbled.

Breezepaw glanced at his sister then turned to Mossyblaze's limp body.
"It is, isn't it..."

And somehow... we are the ones that are going to change everything,

aren't we? He thought to himself.

Chapter Eight

[image]

The smell of rain filled Fernpaw's nose as she padded beside her mentor, Sagebreeze.

Briarpaw and her mentor, Rainfall, padded a few tail lengths ahead of them, along with Cottenclaw and his apprentice, Checkeredpaw. Every now and then, Briarpaw would stop and crouch low to the ground, gazing intently at a flower or a bug hidden in the marshy grass.

Each time, Rainfall would purr in amusement, yet with slight irritation, and meow to get her attention.

It had been a courter moon since their apprentice ceremony, and Fernpaw couldn't shake the uneasy feeling off her chest.

The night before the ceremony, she had another strange dream. She saw her brother, Mudpaw, in the medicine den. At first she thought it was another point of view after he fell into the river, and when he was checked up on, by Pearlfeather.

But the dream had shifted, and suddenly she saw her brother sorting intently through herbs around the den.
The next day at the apprentice ceremony, Mudpaw declared he was going to train as a medicine cat apprentice. It unsettled Fernpaw deeply.

"Fernpaw! Keep up."

Fernpaw shook her head to clear it and looked up to see Sagebreeze ahead of her, gazing at her with a raised eyebrow.

"Sorry!" Fernpaw meowed and padded faster to catch up to the group.

They were taking the morning border patrol and the air was nice and cool due to the fact that it had rained that night.

"Every cat seems to be extremely distracted today." Cottenclaw meowed annoyingly as he glanced at Briarpaw.

"If you're referring to Briarpaw, then I'll unfortunately tell you that she's always like this." Rainfall meowed in what seemed like a tired voice.

Probably from all that yelling to keep Briarpaw on track. Fernpaw thought to herself with a smile.

Briarpaw glanced at the cats where she was gazing distractedly into the trees above them with a confused look.

"Hm?" She meowed, and the group purred in amusement.

Fernpaw yawned, trying to keep her mind off of her dreams, and she gazed around the marshy forest.

It was quite a beautiful place. Even though she had never been in the other clans territories, she was sure none of them could compare to Riverclan territory.

"I think I'm going to take Checkeredpaw to the training area and go over some battle moves, if that's alright." Cottenclaw meowed, breaking the silence.

Fernpaw perked her ears. *That would be a perfect way to get my mind off of things.*

"Could we go as well?" She asked Sagebreeze.

"Go ahead. We can finish up here. We're almost back towards camp anyways." Rainfall meowed, glancing at Briarpaw again, who was now perched on a nearby rock, gazing at whatever was under it.

"Alright then, fine." Sagebreeze nodded and padded with Cottenclaw as the four cats changed direction.

"See ya, Briarpaw!" Fernpaw yelled at her sister, who seemed to not

hear her.

"She really does need to work on that." Checkeredpaw meowed from beside her.

"Huh?" Fernpaw answered as she turned her attention away from her sister.

"She's always unfocused. It could get herself killed."

"Killed?" Fernpaw whimpered a little.

"In a battle. Imagine her being like this in that sort of situation. It would be a total disaster!"

Checkeredpaw said it in a joking way, but Fernpaw couldn't shake the feeling that he could be right.

She shook her head again and sighed. *No. That's mouse brained. Briarpaw is a good fighter. I've seen her in training. Checkeredpaw is just joking anyways.*

"Were here." Cottenclaw meowed from ahead of them.

The cats padded into a thicket of beech trees with a large open clearing known as the training area.

"Fernpaw, you've been working hard on your battle skills. Maybe we can evaluate what you've learned so far as you fight against Checkeredpaw." Sagebreeze meowed.

Fernpaw gulped. She had only ever battled against Briarpaw, who sometimes would beat her. She couldn't imagine how things would go battling against an apprentice who might even be close to becoming a warrior soon.

Fernpaw knew Checkeredpaw and his sister Mistpaw were the kin of Crowstar and Sandfur. Before Crowstar had become leader, his mate gave birth to them. That was *moons* ago. The two apprentices had been training for almost 16 moons, which is when an apprentice has their assessment.

But she couldn't look weak. That was the worst option.

"Take your places in the middle of the clearing." Cottenclaw meowed.

The two apprentices took their places, Checkeredpaw looking smug already.

He knows it's an easy battle.

The two mentors glanced at each other, Sagebreeze nodding silently. Fernpaw raised an eyebrow at them before turning her attention to her opponent.

What was that about? It doesn't matter anyways. I need to think.

"Get ready. Anyone may attack first. This is a free for all battle." Sagebreeze meowed.

He already expects to win. So I need to do something unexpected.

Checkeredpaw got into a springing stance, swinging his tail back in forth, waiting for the cue to begin.

A crouching stance...he's going to leap at me immediately. He wants to end this quickly by using his bigger size to crush me. If I sprint as soon as Cottenclaw gives the signal, maybe I can slide under his leap.

"Ready?" Sagebreeze meowed.

Fernpaw gathered her wight into her back legs, preparing to kick off into a sprint.

Hopefully he leaps high enough...

"Begin!" Cottenclaw yowled.

Fernpaw leaped into a sprint immediately, running head on at Checkeredpaw who had leaped through the air as soon as Cottenclaw had meowed. Fernpaw leaped forward as she neared the black and white cat, sliding beneath the him.

The apprentice landed in surprise and turned on Fernpaw, leaping at her with a yowl. Fernpaw dodged the attack swiftly, her fur blowing behind her as the cat flew only inches past her. Checkeredpaw gritted his teeth in frustration as he turned.

He's getting angry. Fernpaw thought. *Maybe my tactic is tiring him without even attacking... then when he's tired enough, I strike.*

With this plan, Fernpaw felt hope rise in her chest. She wanted to impress her mentor. Maybe this was it.

Checkeredpaw darted quickly at Fernpaw faster than she thought he would, sending her flying as he rammed into her side. She landed on the wet ground with a grunt, quickly pulling herself to her paws and leaping out of the way just in time as her opponent lunged. Fernpaw huffed in triumph at how well her plan was working.

Suddenly, with a flash of white fur, Checkeredpaw rammed his paws into Fernpaws' chest, knocking her off her paws.

He pinned her harshly as she squirmed uselessly under his weight. After a few more moments of aimless struggling, Fernpaw huffed in defeat.

"Aaaaaand you're dead." Checkeredpaw smirked.

"Alright, alright you win." Fernpaw sighed as he let her go. She glanced at the mentors who were whispering to each other.

Sagebreeze shook her head and glanced at Fernpaw.

"Good job. Both of you. Let's call it a day." Cottenclaw meowed.

"What, no suggestions?" Checkeredpaw asked.

"No. We should head back to camp." Sagebreeze murmured.

With that, the two mentors padded out of the hallow. Taking that as a cue, the apprentices followed.

~

As soon as they got back to camp, Sagebreeze dismissed Fernpaw for the day. Fernpaw sighed, wishing she had been able to win her

battle.

Perhaps if I went against Briarpaw again, I can use that tactic. It might work against a less experienced cat.

Suddenly, her thoughts went back to her dream.

I never understood why Mudpaw suddenly wanted to become a medicine cat apprentice anyways. He always seemed like he dreamed of being a warrior.

Fernpaw glanced at the medicine den, Pearlfeather sitting at the entrance, sorting through some herbs. She padded over, glancing at the white and gray she-cat.

"Is Mudpaw inside?" She asked.

The medicine cat nodded silently, her focus on her herbs.

Fernpaw padded into the den, glancing around for her brother. She spotted brown fur as Mudpaw carried some herbs and placed them on a rock. He seemed to be using it as a shelf.

"Hey, Mudpaw." She meowed.

The brown cat turned in surprise and purred.

"Oh hey, Fernpaw. How can I help you?"

His character seemed to have changed since the last time we spoke...maybe training as a medicine cat humbles the soul. She thought grimly.

"Can we talk?" She asked.

"Of course." He continued to go back and forth from a pile of herbs and the shelf, placing them in some sort of order.

"Its about...the accident."

Mudpaw froze midway to the herb pile and glanced at his sister. She knew it was a touchy subject for him. His near drowning

experience really shook him, and she always silently wondered if that had something to do with his choice at the ceremony.

"What about it...?" Mudpaw said slowly before continuing to pad back and forth.

"Was...that the reason you chose to become a medicine cat apprentice? Instead of becoming a warrior?"

He paused again and sighed.

"After...you know. I guess I just realized that leaping into danger and fighting and all that, wasn't for me."

Fernpaw nodded slowly. "Just like that? You just...*knew*?"

"Yes, Fernpaw. I don't think I could have ever been brave enough in battle after that experience. After being so close to death...you kinda just evaluate yourself and what you really want in life. And for me, that's never experiencing that again. Sorry if that's selfish but at least I'm still helping this clan."

Fernpaw nodded knowingly. "Of course. Sorry I just... was curious."

Mudpaw sighed. "Okay now if you don't mind, I have a lot of things to get done. I have my first visit at the moon stone tonight."

Fernpaw huffed and padded out of the den quickly.

At least now I know.

But she couldn't shake the feeling of her dream off of her.

Maybe I silently knew that after Mudpaw fell into the river, he would feel this way. Maybe that's why I dreamed it.

Fernpaw nodded to herself silently, but deep down she knew that wasn't true.

Chapter Nine

[image]

"All cats old enough to leap gather to hear my words!" Falconstar yowled from the top of the Tallrock.

Fadepaw perked her ears and glanced at Arcticwind, who padded out of the medicine den knowingly. Fadepaw padded after her quickly before silently whispering into her mentors ear.

"Is this about the meeting?"

Arcticwind flicked her tail in annoyance before hissing under her breath.

"Quiet yourself. And what do you think?"

The two medicine cats sat at the back of the crowd gathered beneath the rock.

"I will be traveling to the moon stone with Arcticwind and Fadepaw under certain circumstances." Falconstar meowed loudly.

The group of cats murmured to each other worriedly at their leaders words.

"There is nothing to be concerned about." Falconstar yowled over the hushed voices.

"But for...safety reasons, I will be taking some warriors with me."

Silverleaf, a silver colored she-cat, stepped forward, gazing up at her leader.

"Is this the same sort of meeting you had with all of the leaders after the battle between dark and light?" The she-cat asked.

Falconstar gazed around worriedly before slowly nodding.

"Yes. Its just a humble meeting discussing-

"The prophecy?" Aspenberry asked, stepping beside Silverleaf.

Falconstar huffed as murmurs began to rise from the crowd once again.

"Enough!" He yowled. "Quietwave, Waspclaw, you'll be coming with me."

Fadepaw glanced at the two warriors as they stood up knowingly, before padding over to the rock. Breezepaw and Featherpaw glanced at each other confusedly.

They couldn't make this look even more suspicious, could they? Fadepaw thought sarcastically.

"Ivyclaw will be watching over the camp while we're gone." Falconstar continued. "Clan dismissed." He finished as he jumped down from the rock, nodding to Ivyclaw.

"Lets go." Arcticwind meowed to Fadepaw, padding forward sightlessly.
Fadepaw followed her mentor as Falconstar lead the group of cats out of the camp.
~
The moon was almost at its highest by the time the group reached the middle of the moor. Quietwave and Waspclaw padded beside Falconstar silently, while the two medicine cats walked a few paw steps behind.

"Are we meeting the other leaders and medicine cats at the moon stone?" Fadepaw asked.

Arcticwind nodded silently, gazing ahead intently.

"Do you even know what the meeting is about?" Fadepaw murmured. She knew a meeting was planned to occur a quarter moon after the chosen ones apprentice ceremonies, but that was it.

"Stop asking questions, how bout that?" Her mentor answered grouchily.

Fadepaw sighed and padded silently. The trek was making her remember the last meeting they had with all of the leaders, after the battle between dark and light. She remembered walking the same path to the moon stone with Arcticwind and Falconstar.

She remembered walking through the tunnel deep into the mountain, until she emerged into the moon stones cave. She had meowed a greeting to Pearlfeather who responded by saying:

"Greetings, Fadepaw. Arcticwind." The white and gray she-cat dipped her head to Falconstar who returned the gesture, before padding over to Crowstar.

"Are we the only ones here?" Fadepaw meowed in surprise.

"Not anymore." Arcticwind meowed before Amberstar and Cloverwish entered through the tunnel.

The cats meowed their greetings, sitting in a small circle as they waited for Shadowclan. A few minutes passed before Bearstar and Raspberrywhisper padded into the cave.

"Sorry if we kept you waiting." Bearstar meowed. "Many cats were very confused at this sudden meeting." The Shadowclan leader glared at Crowstar before sitting down as far away as he could from him.

"Yes." Raspberrywhisper hissed. "They kept asking so many questions."

"As they should." Amberstar murmured. "Every cat is worried. Word is slowly getting out about the prophecy in Thunderclan."

"Same with Windclan." Falconstar meowed.

The rest of the clan leaders nodded in understanding.

"But how?" Cloverwish growled. "We all promised to keep the prophecy on the down low until we figured out what it means."

"Maybe Riverclan cats tend to run their mouths a little too *much." Bearstar hissed at Crowstar.*

"Or perhaps Shadowclan are simply too short minded to keep a secret."

Crowstar hissed back, unsheathing his claws.

"Enough!" Amberstar yowled, stepping in between the two leaders. "I understand both of your clans just finished an intense battle. But tonight we must control our anger."

"Maybe if Crowstar didn't decide he suddenly wanted more of the river on our territory, the battle would have never happened!" Bearstar yowled over Amberstar's shoulder.

"It doesn't matter anyways, Bearstar." Raspberrywhisper meowed, touching her tail to his shoulder. "We chased them off. We beat them."

Crowstar hissed and almost seemed like he was going to lunge, before Amberstar pushed him back with her shoulder.

"I said enough!" She yowled. "We are here because of the prophecy. If we don't discover what it means, there might not be any clans at all!"

The two hissing leaders glanced at their paws before sitting down slowly.

"I know what it means."

All of the cats turned their heads towards Fadepaw, and it took her a moment to realize they were looking at Arcticwind, from beside her.

"Arcticwind?" Falconstar meowed confusedly.

"Over the time of the battle, I thought carefully of what the prophecy means." The blind medicine cat continued.

"To recap your memories, the prophecy is: leaf fall will destroy the clans. Unless the four born on the battle of dark and light can unite, and use what they have been given. Only four will save the clans."

The cats nodded silently, waiting for her to get to the point.

"I am still unsure what Starclan meant by "leaf fall will destroy the clans", but the battle between light and dark was the battle between Shadowclan and Riverclan."

"What makes you sure?" Pearlfeather murmured. "Starclan could have

been referring to any battles in the future."

"Because." Arcticwind huffed. "Two kits were born that night. During the battle."

The cats around the cave gasped and looked at each other in surprise.

"As I suspected..." Arcticwind whispered as she noticed their reactions.

"Three kits were born that night in Riverclan..." Crowstar meowed.

"Two kits in Shadowclan..." Bearstar murmured.

All heads turned to Amberstar who nodded in surprise.

"Two in Thunderclan."

"But I did find a newborn kit in Thunderclan territory on my way back from the moon stone that night." Cloverwish meowed. "And I can confirm that it was definitely born that night. It was left all alone though. The mother of the two kits is now taking care of him like it's her own."

"But surely a rouge born kit won't be one of the chosen ones." Crowstar huffed.

"We can't be sure." Arcticwind meowed. "It must be considered."

"So if I'm hearing this right." Bearstar asked. "The four born on the battle between dark and light is one of these kits?"

"Its obvious that one kit from each clan will be destined." Pearlfeather murmured.

"How are we supposed to tell which ones are the chosen ones?" Fadepaw asked, gaining enough courage to speak up.

"We must wait until they're apprentices." Arcticwind meowed. "Until then...just observe them closely."

"We shouldn't tell them." Amberstar murmured. "We can't have there knowledge of it effect them."

The cats nodded.

"We will meet here once again a quarter moon after their apprentice ceremony." Arcticwind continued. "Then we will discuss how we will go about discovering which of them are the chosen ones."

The cats nodded again silently before standing up, taking that as a cue that the meeting was concluded. Fadepaw glanced up at her mentor who was surprisingly gazing back at her with sightless eyes.

"Fadepaw-

"Were here." Arcticwind meowed.

Fadepaw snapped out of her memories and glanced at her mentor who was staring intently ahead at the entrance to the moon stones cave.

"Seems like we are the last ones to arrive." Falconstar meowed, sniffing the air, before padding into the tunnel.

Waspclaw and Quietwave followed quickly after him, the medicine cats close behind. It was quiet and dark as the group padded through the narrow passageway. A few minutes passed until they finally emerged into the moon stones cave.

As Falconstar had said, all of the clans were already there. Bearstar, Raspberrywhisper, and two strange cats Fadepaw didn't recognize, sat at the far end of the cave.

On the opposite side of the cave sat Crowstar, Pearlfeather, and two more unfamiliar cats.

I see Shadowclan and Riverclan are still avoiding each other. Fadepaw thought annoyingly.

"Greetings, Falconstar." Amberstar meowed from the middle of the cave where she sat with Cloverwish and three cats.

"Amberstar." Falconstar dipped his head respectfully to the Thunderclan leader, taking a seat.

"Now we can begin." Arcticwind huffed.

"Each apprentice has had their ceremony I'm guessing?" Cloverwish meowed.

Pearlfeather nodded. "Yes. But one of the chosen ones, Mudpaw, chose to be my apprentice at his ceremony."

"Could that mean something?" Bearstar meowed. "Is it possible Starclan planned that one of the chosen ones become a medicine cat?"

"If this future battle is to happen, why would Starclan make one of the chosen ones good with herbs?" Crowstar huffed. "Starclan would choose the most skillful in battle."

"Medicine cats are very important in battles." Pearlfeather hissed. "Without us, you all would most likely be dead."

"Enough bickering." Arcticwind hissed. "We are here to speak with *all* of the mentors. To hear about their observations of the apprentices"

Quietwave nodded, nudging Waspclaw who sat up, gazing around at the cats.

"I am the mentor of Breezepaw, Quietwave is Featherpaw's." Waspclaw meowed. "We have observed them, and although Breezepaw has much spirit and strength, he lacks precision."

Quietwave nodded again, sitting up. "Featherpaw on the other hand has proven recently that she has great potential."

Fadepaw glanced at Waspclaw, who seemed to be gritting his teeth.

He's probably upset at the fact that Quietwave's apprentice is most likely the chosen one. She thought grimly.

"The other day, she caught the biggest rabbit I have ever seen an apprentice catch!" Quietwave continued.

"That was poisoned..." Waspclaw murmured.

"Poisoned?!" A dark gray tom sitting beside Bearstar yowled in surprise.

"Yes, Darkpool." Falconstar huffed, glaring at Waspclaw. "A few sun rises ago, one of our elders passed due to a rabbit being poisoned. But we have checked all of our prey, and nothing else seems to be poisoned."

Bearstar glanced at Darkpool with a raised eyebrow before nodding.

"Very well. Continue."

Quietwave glanced at Waspclaw before continuing.

"It could very well be either of them, but we are leaning towards Featherpaw."

"What are we even looking for?" Waspclaw hissed lowly. "We know it has to be one of the kits born on the battle between dark and light, but that's it."

"We aren't sure." Falconstar huffed. "We are simply just going off of observations for now. We are hoping to discover more as they grow and train."

Waspclaw sighed, sitting down.

Amberstar then turned to the three cats beside her. "Hawkfang, Owlwhisker, Autumnleaf, would you?"

The three cats nodded, sitting up.

"We definitely are not sure yet." Owlwhisker meowed nervously. "With three apprentices, it's hard to narrow it down to one."

"Don't you mentor the rouge born apprentice?" Crowstar meowed.

"Like I've said numerous times- Cloverwish started but was cut off by Crowstar. "Yes yes, we know. The rouge born could well be the chosen one. But we must think logically. Is it really possible that a cat born outside of the clans, is destined to save them?"

The cave was silent for a moment before Autumnleaf spoke up.

"That must mean Pebblepaw is a worthy option."

Hawkfang nodded. "Snowypaw has much to offer to Thunderclan, but he doesn't seem fit for the role of saving the clans."

"Pebblepaw then..." Amberstar mumbled.

Pearlfeather then sat up. " Rainfall, Sagebreeze." She meowed, nodding to the two cats beside her.

"Well, Briarpaw is defiantly not the chosen one." Rainfall purred. "She has much potential for having great battle skills, but she is defiantly not the *one*."

"Fernpaw seems to have a brilliant mind. She uses tactical thinking to her advantage." Sagebreeze meowed. "She could be the one."

"Mudpaw has learned herbs faster than I ever thought." Pearlfeather purred. "He could be as well. He was especially upset that I told him he wasn't ready to come to the moon stone yet?"

Crowstar nodded slowly, thinking to himself.

"I guess that means we're last, Blazepelt." Darkpool huffed. "It could very well be either of them."

"Thistlepaw has been improving rapidly since we began training." Blazepelt meowed proudly.

"So you're unsure?" Bearstar meowed.

The two cats nodded, sitting back down.

"Well..." Arcticwind huffed after what seemed like a very long silence. "Let us keep a very close eye on those we suspect are the chosen ones. But be discrete. They must not know the truth. Not yet."

"Thats it?" Waspclaw hissed. "We just do exactly what we've been doing since these cats have been born? We *observe*?"

Arcticwind sat up, glaring with sightless eyes at the black colored tom. "Yes, you *fool*. We observe. Starclan has not given us anything else. So what else *can* we do?!"

"What about the part of the prophecy: "Leaf fall will destroy the clans?" What could *that* mean?" Waspclaw hissed back.

"Enough!" Falconstar yowled. "We must stop fighting every time we meet. A battle is coming. A battle that could destroy us all. We must stay together and prepare."

The cats all nodded silently.

"Now...I think that adjures this meeting." Pearlfeather murmured.

"Yes...for now, let us meet again when one of us has any updates." Amberstar meowed.

The group began to disperse, padding out of the cave. Fadepaw glanced at Arcticwind, who glared ahead silently.

She's angry. But not at Waspclaw I presume.

She followed her mentor through the tunnel and sighed.

No...she's mad at Starclan. Because Waspclaw was right. We are barley making any progress. And Starclan is doing nothing to help.

Chapter Ten

[image]

Breezepaw glared at the entrance to the camp, flicking his tail back in forth. Featherpaw glanced at him and sighed, swallowing the chunk of bird she was eating.

"Would you stop that?" She meowed annoyingly.

Breezepaw blinked and turned his head away from the entrance to look at his sister.

"Huh?"

"They'll be back soon. Just finish eating." She nudged Breezepaw's untouched hare over to him.

"Not like you've eaten much anyway..." Featherpaw huffed.

Breezepaw sighed, taking a small bite, blood dripping from his lips.

"Aren't you curious about why both of our mentors, Falconstar, *and* the medicine cats are meeting at the moon stone for some secret meeting with the rest of the clan leaders?" He asked quickly.

Featherpaw sighed. "Your overthinking things. So what he took our mentors? He said he needed protection. Which is reasonable since it wasn't that long ago that there was the battle between dark and light."

Breezepaw gazed at his sister in shock.

"Where did you hear that?" He asked.

"Hear what?"

"The battle between dark and light?"

"What do you mean, Breezepaw? Every one knows."

"Yes, but..."

"Breezepaw! Featherpaw!" A light brown kit padded up to them, his tail in the air.

"Oh hey, Sprucekit." Featherpaw purred.

Sprucekit began to ramble on about how him and Duskcloud played moss ball. Breezepaw turned away from them and blinked in surprise as Falconstar and the group padded into camp.

Waspclaw and Quietwave turned their heads, seeming to be staring at him. It took him a second for him to realize that they were really staring at Featherpaw.

~

The next morning went by quickly. No cat seemed to be talking about the mysterious meeting the night before.

Breezepaw decided to distract himself by tagging along on a border patrol with Ivyclaw, Nightwind, Lightberry, and his father, Smokeface.

The five cats padded along the Shadowclan border, the only sound being Nightwind and Lightberry quietly murmuring to each other.

Smokeface padded beside Breezepaw and nudged him lightly.

"We haven't spoken in awhile I feel like." The gray tom meowed.

"Really? Well I've been busy training I guess." Breezepaw responded.

"How is that going by the way? You're training?"

"Good I think." Breezepaw glared at his paws. "But Featherpaw seems to be doing *great*."

Smokeface blinked and shook his head with a purr.

"Ah, classic sibling rivalry."

Breezepaw glanced up at the tom in surprise.

"Were not rivals! It's just... even Waspclaw thinks she's doing much better than I am."

Smokeface purred in amusement.

"Waspclaw is just harsh on every apprentice he teaches. It's his method I guess."

It was silent for a few moments before the tom spoke again.

"Just don't let that ruin your relationship with Featherpaw. You're kin."

Breezepaw nodded, gazing at his paws. Yet as he remembered the way Waspclaw scorned him for being worse than Featherpaw, he unsheathed his claws, hissing under his breath.

Suddenly, Ivyclaw, who was padding in the lead, stopped abruptly, her tail in the air.

"Ivyclaw?" Nightwind whispered. "What is it?"

It was quiet for a few moments. The only sound being a few tweets from the trees.

"Do you smell that?" Ivyclaw hissed.

Lightberry padded forward, sniffing the air. "Its not a scent from any of the clans." She huffed.

Smokeface padded forward as well, Breezepaw following him. All of the cats sniffing the air.

Breezepaw wrinkled his nose in disgust. "Smells weird, that's for sure." He mumbled.

"Its rouge scent." Ivyclaw hissed. "What are they doing so far away from the barn?"

"The barn?" Breezepaw meowed in confusion.

"Awhile ago, a group of rouges strayed into Windclan territory, seeking shelter." Smokeface meowed. "It was leaf bare at the time and the clan leader before Falconstar, Mintystar, decided to search for shelter for the rouges. They found a barn and made an agreement that as long as the rouges stayed out of clan territory, the clan cats wouldn't start any trouble with them."

"You finished with your history lesson?" Ivyclaw hissed, glaring at Smokeface.

"Obviously they broke the deal." Nightwind huffed. "We should inform Falconstar."

"This scent seems off..." Lightberry whispered.

"What do you mean?" Smokeface meowed.

"Like its..." Lightberry's eyes widened. "Cat blood. It smells like cat blood."

Breezepaw's eyes narrowed and he sniffed the air.

She's right...

He sniffed deeply, turning his head towards a nearby tree near the Shadowclan border.

"Smokeface..." He murmered. "Look."

The cats turned, Ivyclaw padding closer to the tree. Along the rough bark, was a long smear of dark red blood.

~

Breezepaw leaped over a large boulder with intense speed he never knew he had. The rest of the group decided to quickly get to the barn, Lightberry insisting that something was very wrong. Ivyclaw sent Breezepaw to run back to camp to inform Falconstar.

Breezepaw swerved around another boulder, nearing the tunnel into camp. He sprinted through it, looking around desperately before spotting Falconstar sitting below the Tallrock, speaking with Fishpounce.

"Falconstar!" Breezepaw huffed as he reached the leader and the elder.

"Breezepaw?" The dark brown tom meowed confusedly.

"We must head to the barn immediately! Something is wrong."

"What-

"Please! Just trust me."

It was quiet for a moment. Falconstar staring at the apprentice intently.

"Very well." He finally said. "Fishpounce. Inform the clan of my absence. I will return shortly."

Fishpounce nodded, equally confused, before Falconstar nodded to Breezepaw.

"Lets go."

The large brown tom leaped towards the entrance, Breezepaw sprinting after him. The two cats sprinted across the moor, Breezepaw bounding suddenly ahead of the leader. He slowed down in surprise, keeping a steady pace with Falconstar, who stared back at him confusedly.

The two cats reached the barn in no time, Breezepaw reaching a stop. Falconstar huffed in exhaustion yet Breezepaw still seemed full of energy. The leader walked past the apprentice towards the entrance, gazing at him weirdly.

They entered the abandoned building to be intercepted by Ivyclaw.

"Falconstar! Thank goodness your here..." She glanced at Breezepaw before sighing shakily.

"You need to see this..." She meowed, turning and leading them towards a large stack of hay. The cats padded behind it only to see Nightwind and Lightberry standing over some sort of pile. Smokeface was standing nearby, his claws digging into the wooden

floor. He turned and padded to Breezepaw.

"Maybe you should leave, Breezepaw..." he murmured.

"What? No I-

Breezepaw started before trailing off.

Falconstar hissed in horror as he realized what the pile was, and shook his head in shock. Breezepaw blinked and nudged past his father.

The pile was a pile of cats. Dead cats. There must be at least three of them, but their limbs twisted around each other in awkward angles. Whoever, or *whatever,* did this to them, broke every single one of their legs.

Breezepaw's throat filled with bile, and he swallowed it down. The corpses eyes seemed to be staring at nothing, and blood dripped from their mouths.

"Whoever did this..." Lightberry turned to Falconstar. "Is a monster." She whimpered slightly.

Falconstar padded closer to the pile, touching his nose lightly to one of the victims nose.

"Whoever did this wanted to send a message." Ivyclaw hissed. "And Falconstar..."

The leader turned to his deputy, sadness in his gaze.

"I believe the message is obvious." The she-cat continued.

"We're next."

Chapter Eleven

[image]

Fernpaw opened her eyes, only to be greeted by darkness. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust, when suddenly, the clouds shifted, and the moon shined its bright light down on the vast moor.

Windclan territory...? Fernpaw thought to herself. *How did I get here?*

She gasped and crouched down low against the tall grass as she suddenly saw dark figures creeping towards what seemed like a large hole.

Windclan camp...

She narrowed her eyes, trying to get a better glimpse at the figures. They almost seemed like dark shadows, stalking its prey. But what scared her the most was how many there were.

There must be at least thirty cats down there...

They stopped above the dip into the Winclan camp, before yowling loudly and leaping down into the hallow and through the tunnel entrance. Fernpaw stood up and yowled in surprise.

I should get help! Windclan won't stand a chance against that number of cats.

She begun to turn but she couldn't move her paws. Suddenly, her surroundings changed, and she was in the middle of the Windclan camp. Cats all around her were wailing and yowling in battle.

The strange cats looked like shadows with red eyes and long fangs. They were huge. Windclan was no doubt losing greatly, caught off guard to the surprise attack.

Fernpaw hissed fearfully as a shadow cat turned on her, baring its long fangs at her. She tried to raise her paw, but she still couldn't

move. The cat smirked, and lunged with a yowl.

~

Fernpaw screeched as her eyes snapped open, and she sat up quickly. She was in the apprentice den. Safe, in Riverclan.

"Great Starclan, Fernpaw!" Shrewpaw hissed from the back of the den. "You scared me half to death!"

Fernpaw breathed rapidly, looking around in confusion. It was dark in the den, still night, but she could still see the apprentices annoyed glares.

"Are you alright?" Mistpaw asked, one of the only cats not glaring.

Briarpaw sighed, laying her head on her paws. "She's fine. This always used to happen in the nursery."

"W-Windclan..." Fernpaw whispered.

"Well, it's not sunrise just yet." Checkeredpaw murmured, yawning. "So we can still get a few more minutes of valuable shut-eye."

The apprentices nodded in agreement, closing their eyes. Fernpaw counted her breaths, trying to steady her heartbeat.

"You sure you're okay?" Twigpaw asked from a few nest's over. He gazed at her with concern.

"I... yeah I'm fine..." Fernpaw whispered. "Thanks, Twigpaw.

Twigpaw purred, laying his head on his paws and closing his eyes. Fernpaw did the same, yet she couldn't shake the uneasy feeling she had.

It was just a dream...

But she wasn't so sure this time. Every dream she had had in the past few quarter moons, always seemed to come true.

She didn't know how or why, but she couldn't deny what was happening.

I have to tell someone...maybe Pearlfeather will know what to do. She is *a medicine cat, and probably has visions all the time.*

But she knew that might mean she would have to tell Mudpaw.

I don't know if I want every cat to know. Especially not my kin. Because...what if I'm wrong? And this really is all in my head?

She shivered and squeezed her eyes shut.

But I have to know for sure. For Windclan's sake.

~

Fernpaw sighed in relief as the last bit of sunlight streamed into the den, causing some of the apprentices to stir. She hadn't been able to fall asleep again due to the constant worry nagging her at the back of her mind.

Fernpaw rose to her paws quickly, stretching slowly, trying to seem normal, and padded out of the den. She looked around the quiet camp.

The air was cool and calm as cats slowly padded out of their own dens. Her eyes landed on the medicine den and began to walk towards it but was stopped but a meow from behind her.

"Fernpaw!" Briarpaw said, padding up to her with tired eyes. Briarpaw looked her up and down and sighed. "Did you get *any* sleep last night?"

Fernpaw forced a purr and nodded. "Yeah? Why do you ask?"

Briarpaw shook her head unbelievably and padded past her towards a group of cats. "No reason, Fernpaw...no reason."

Fernpaw sighed, hating that she was lying to her kin.

It's for her own good. No need to worry her.

She then continued her trek to the medicine den, pausing at the entrance as Mudpaw walked out with a yawn.

"Oh hey, Mudpaw. Is Pearlfeather in there?" She asked.

He finished his yawn and nodded, sitting down and rapping his tail around his paws. Before he could ask her why, she padded inside quickly. Pearlfeather was stretching by her nest when she spotted her.

"What can I do for you?" She meowed tiredly.

Fernpaw swallowed hard, unsure where to start. "Well, uh...its sorta important. At least I *think* it is? I'm not sure, but I just thought I would talk to you about it since your a medicine cat and all, and you guys see visions all the time and-

"A vision?" Pearlfeather meowed in surprise.

Fernpaw nodded nervously.

"You got a vision? Is that what you're saying?" Pearlfeather whispered.

Fernpaw nodded again.

"I...I should get Crowstar."

"No!" Fernpaw meowed lowly. "Please. I'm not sure if its even a real vision or if its just a dream. I don't want to start a huge fuss over nothing."

Pearlfeather nodded slowly before sitting down.

"Tell me then. What happened in this dream?"

"Well...it was night. And I was in Windclan territory. And I saw these...shadowed cats. They sorta looked like they were made of shadows or something. Then they attacked the Windclan camp. Then suddenly I was *in* the camp and cats were fighting all around me..."

Fernpaw started to shake at the memory, and Pearlfeather gazed at her in worry.

"And...Windclan...they were losing...badly. I wanted to tell you in case this was real. Pearlfeather...these cats were murdering

Windclan cats. Brutally."

Pearlfeather nodded slowly.

"Well...this definitely doesn't seem like just a dream."

Fernpaw gazed at the medicine cat in fear.

"What do we do?! Are you sure it's real?"

Pearlfeather sighed. "All I can say is...I think I've figured it out. And I just need you to trust me on this. This was no dream. Starclan sent a message to you."

The medicine cat sat up and stepped closer to the apprentice.

"But I need you to tell me this. Has this ever happened before? These visions that seem like dreams?"

Fernpaw gazed at her paws, beginning to shake again.

"I..."

Suddenly, Mudpaw entered the den.

"Everything okay in here?" He meowed.

No one replied. Pearlfeather was staring intently at Fernpaw until after a few moments she turned to her apprentice.

"Fetch Crowstar, please."

"Is everything-

"Mudpaw."

"Okay..."

He padded out of the den, glancing at Fernpaw confusedly.

Pearlfeather turned to her again sympathetically.

"Fernpaw, it's okay to be afraid. But I need you to answer the

question."

Fernpaw took a deep breath before slowly nodding.

"Yes...I've gotten dreams...that end up happening in real time..."

Pearlfeather's eyes widened. "Can you give me an example?"

"Well...before Mudpaw's accident... I had a dream of a kit falling into a river that was yelling for help."

The medicine cat nodded, her mind racing. Suddenly, Crowstar padded into the den, followed by Mudpaw.

"Yes?" He meowed worriedly.

"Mudpaw, you can go." Pearlfeather meowed.

"But-

"Go." She meowed sternly.

The brown tom nodded, glancing at Fernpaw again before padding out.

"Fernpaw, tell Crowstar about your dream with Windclan." Pearlfeather meowed.

Fernpaw took another deep breath before explaining her dream again to the leader.

"This is...concerning..." Crowstar murmured when she was done. "And you're sure this is real?" He whispered to Pearlfeather, who nodded.

"Well then it's obvious." The Riverclan leader hissed. "The shadow cats you saw in your vision is Shadowclan. Starclan is warning us."

"Shadowclan?" Fernpaw meowed. "But why-

"You saw *shadow cats*." He hissed. "Its obvious what Starclan is trying to tell us!" He turned to Pearlfeather. "If Fernpaw's dream is truly accurate, then Windclan really doesn't stand a chance.

Starclan sent her that vision so that Riverclan could help."

Crowstar then turned to Fernpaw.

"You said this was at night?"

She nodded.

"Then we must attack them tonight." He hissed, unsheathing his claws. "We can't be sure when they are planning to attack Windclan, so we must strike first."

"But Crowstar, we don't know for sure that Shadowclan is even- Fernpaw started.

The leader hissed, ignoring the apprentice .

"We must ready our warriors. We must prepare for battle."

Chapter Twelve

[image]

The last bit of sunlight disappeared, and the Shadowclan camp became dark. Thistlepaw licked her lips clean as she finished the small sparrow she was sharing with Rainpaw. The rest of the apprentices were nearby, murmuring to each other in excitement.

"They're so lucky." Rainpaw sighed.

"Hm?" Thistlepaw followed her sisters gaze at the three apprentices.

"Did you not hear? All of their mentors decided it was time for their warrior assessments."

"Oh wow, lucky them." Thistlepaw meowed uninterestedly.

Rainpaw raised an eyebrow.

"I thought you were totally exited to simply be an apprentice? And the thought of being a warrior doesn't even faze you?"

Thistlepaw purred in amusement.

"That might have affected me a moon ago, but after training with Blazepelt, I sorta realized the more important things in life."

"Thistlepaw? Wise and patient? Who would have thought!" Rainpaw meowed sarcastically.

"Well you've changed too! You aren't the helpless, scaredy kit I remember you to be."

"I guess becoming an apprentice changes you."

"Nah." Thistlepaw's eyes landed on Blazepelt, who was murmuring to a group of warriors. "I think being trained by the right mentor changes you."

They talked awhile longer with each other before heading off to the apprentice den.

Thistlepaw curled up into a ball in her nest and sighed in relief. The rest of the apprentices padded into the den, giggling to each other.

"I bet Dustyfur is ganna let me do a battle for my assessment." Oceanpaw meowed as she laid down in her own nest. "He knows battling is my strong suit."

"Well Forestclaw better let me do a hunting mission." Dovepaw huffed. "I'm great at scouting for prey!"

Lillypaw just nodded shyly.

"Are you nervous?" Thistlepaw whispered to the white and grey she-cat.

Lillypaw glanced at her in surprise and nodded.

"Just a little..." She whispered back, glancing at her sisters who were still talking excitedly with each other.

"You'll do great." Rainpaw murmured a few nests over. "Don't worry. Just act like its a normal training day."

Lillypaw purred to them gratefully before laying her head on her paws and closing her eyes.

Thistlepaw did the same, and soon the den was very quiet. She was slowly drifting off to sleep when suddenly, a strange noise sounded from outside the camp.

Thistlepaw was used to her strange enhanced senses, so she pricked her ears curiously. Paw steps sounded, lots of them.

Thats weird...shouldn't the patrols be back by now?

Her eyes snapped open as she sniffed the air.

Thats not Shadowclan scent...

Suddenly, loud battle cries began to abrupt from outside of the den, followed by screeches.

"What was that?!" Rainpaw yowled as yowls filled the night.

The older apprentices jumped to their paws, rushing out of the den.

"Thistlepaw!" Rainpaw meowed fearfully, her eyes wide.

"Come on!" Thistlepaw growled, leaping to her paws and out of the den.

The Shadowclan camp was filled with fighting cats. Cats streamed down from the small camp walls, hissing.

"Whats going on?!" Rainpaw asked the other apprentices.

"Riverclan." Oceanpaw hissed. "Their attacking."

"What? Why?!"

"Revenge." Dovepaw hissed.

Suddenly, a large, dark brown tom lunged towards Thistlepaw, yowling loudly. But before he could reach her, Oceanpaw leaped at the tom, knocking him out of his leap. The two cats rolled on the ground, hissing.

"Oceanpaw!" Rainpaw yowled.

Dovepaw hissed a battle cry, leaping at the tom.

"What do we do?!" Rainpaw shouted over the commotion.

"We fight." Thistlepaw hissed. She turned away from her sister, gazing around the camp. Her gaze scanned above the camp walls where she spotted a large, dark gray and black tom standing on the ledge, watching the battle below.

Crowstar.

Thistelpaw hissed and began to sprint towards the camp wall, dodging around cats rolling around on the ground.

That mouse brain has the guts to surprise attack us in our own camp, just because of a battle they lost moons ago?!

She unsheathed her claws as she ran, baring her teeth in anger. But before she could reach the wall where the Riverclan leader stood, she was knocked off her paws as a strong body rammed into her.

A black tom with white spots hissed at her as she quickly rose to her paws. He looked like he was a young warrior. Perhaps an older apprentice.

The tom hissed again, unsheathing his claws, hungry to dig them into her pelt. He stalked closer to her before swiping a blow to her face. She yowled in surprise as his claws sank into her cheek.

She glared back at him with anger, as blood trickled down her face. She leaped at him with a yowl, knocking him over onto his back. She pinned him with ease and hissed in his face as he struggled to break free.

He tried to swat her face again but she caught his paw with her teeth, sinking them into his front leg.
He yowled in pain before sinking his own teeth into her shoulder, causing her to whimper and loosen her grip on him.

Using that, he kicked her off with his hind legs. She scrambled to her paws, wincing in pain as her shoulder burned. She glanced up at the top of the camp wall, and hissed in anger as Crowstar still stood there, gazing down at the battle.

She looked back at her opponent and yowled over the battle cries.

"Your leader can't even help you in your own battle?! Instead he watches like a coward!"

The toms eyes narrowed to slits, digging his claws into the ground.

"Watch your tongue you Shadowclan scum! Thats my father you're speaking of!"

He then leaped at her in fury. He tackled her to the ground, causing them to roll over each other. As soon as she felt the ground on her

back, Thistlepaw kicked out her hind legs as hard as she possibly could, causing the tom to go flying off of her.

Her eyes widened as the cat flew through the air, hitting the camp wall with a sickening snap. She rolled onto her paws, wincing again as she limped towards the toms limp form.

She reached him only to gasp in horror as his eyes stared at nothing, his neck twisted in an unnatural angle.

I didn't...I didn't mean to kick that hard...I...

Suddenly, the sparrow she ate earlier came up, causing her to vomit near the black and white cats body.

"Checkeredpaw!" Crowstar yowled from the top of the camp wall. The leader leaped down, shoving past Thistlepaw.

He stepped back in surprise at the sight of the cats sightless eyes and twisted neck.

"Checkeredpaw...my son..."

Thistlepaw watched in numb shock as the Riverclan leader nudged Checkeredpaw with his nose.

"He's....he's dead." He hissed, turning his furious eyes onto Thistlepaw. "YOU KILLED MY SON!"

The leader leaped at her with a loud battle cry. Thistlepaw whimpered in fear as the large black tom trampled her onto her back.

"MURDERER!" He spat in her face as he pinned her. "I'LL KILL YOU, YOU WORTHLESS SHADOWCLAN SCUM!" He bared his long fangs at her, preparing to sink them into her neck.

Her eyes widened in fear as the tom lunged his head forward. Before he could react, she sunk her teeth into his neck before his fangs could reach hers. His eyes gazed into hers in surprise as she released her hold.

She stared back in horror and shock as blood dripped from his mouth, landing on her face. His eyes then clouded over, and his body went limp, toppling off of her. She gasped in fear as the leader lay dead, blood pouring from his neck.

Thistlepaw scrambled to her paws and yowled in fear.

"HELP!" She shrieked. "H-HELP!"

Cats around her began to pull away from their fights to stare at the black furred form of Crowstar. Suddenly the camp became very quiet as cats began to realize what had happened.

Murmurs of surprise rose from the camp as they began to circle around Thistlepaw and Crowstars body. The only sound being Thistlepaw's loud breathing as she stared at the cats wide eyes.

Suddenly, a white and tan colored she-cat pushed her way through the now formed crowd, and shrieked in agony.

"Crowstar!" She yowled as she leaped towards the limp body. Her gaze shifted to Thistlepaw.

"You! You did this didn't you?!" She looked as if she was going to leap at her before a white tom stepped from the crowd.

"Sandfur, dont!" He yowled as he stepped in between the two cats. "Crowstar has six lives left remember?"

"Five, now." Sandfur hissed, her eyes slits as she bared her teeth at Thistlepaw. Her eyes then widened as she turned towards Checkeredpaw's limp body.

"My son!" She crouched by his body and shrieked in agony as she realized he wasn't breathing. "He's not...he's not..." she whimpered.

The white tom turned to Thistlepaw, his eyes wide.

"*You* did this? To them both?"

Thistlepaw shook in fear, her eyes widened as she gazed at the group of cats who stood around them in shock.

"Thistlepaw!" Bearstar yowled as he pushed through the crowd. He stood by her, gazing at the white tom challengingly.

The camp was silent again, the only sound being the shrieks from Sandfur.

"Move!" Fangtooth yowled as he led Raspberrywhisper towards Checkeredpaw's body. The medicine cat whispered something to Sandfur who nodded slowly, stepping back. It was quiet again as Raspberrywhisper analyzed Checkeredpaw's limp form. She then gazed at Sandfur and shook her head.

Thistlepaw perked her ears, and was the only cat to hear the medicine cats whisper.

"His neck...it seems to have snapped from impact...I'm so sorry...theres nothing I can do."

Sandfur yowled in agony again and fell to her paws. A white she-cat with black markings emerged from the crowd, whimpering as she rushed towards the body.

"Mistpaw..." Sandfur whimpered into the white she-cats fur.

Suddenly, Crowstar's body twitched, and the leaders eyes unclouded. He coughed up some blood, his wounds somehow gone, and turned towards Sandfur who purred gratefully at her mate.

Bearstar gazed at Crowstar cooly before dipping his head. The camp was once again silent, all cats seeming to wait to see what the Riverclan leader would do. Crowstar's eyes landed on Thistlepaw, and his gaze turned evil. He then glanced at his mate, whimpering over his sons body and he sighed.

"Riverclan...retreat." He meowed before walking to his mate and whispering something to her. She whimpered and nodded as she and Mistpaw lifted up Checkeredpaw's body.

"Gingerpelt, lead the way please." Crowstar yowled to a light orange tom, most likely the deputy. The Riverclan cats slowly began to reluctantly pad out of the camp. Crowstar padded beside Sandfur, helping to carry his sons body. The Shadowclan cats watched in

silence as the intruders left the camp.

As soon as they were all gone, Bearstar turned to Thistlepaw with narrowed eyes.

"What did you do, Thistlepaw?"

His calmness scared her.

"I..." She whimpered. "I don't know...I didn't mean to kick him that hard! And then Crowstar attacked me and I panicked! He said he was going to kill me!" She yowled in terror. She was shaking violently.

"Bearstar..." Raspberrywhisper padded over to the leader. She then whispered something into his ear that must have been meant for Thistlepaw not to hear, yet she heard it anyways.

"She's the one."

Bearstar's eyes widened before nodding slowly. "But she killed-

"Out of self defense." Raspberrywhisper meowed. "She obviously doesn't know her own strength."

The leader nodded.

Thistlepaw's gaze turned towards the crowd, her eyes landing on Rainpaw who stared at her in fear. Next to her was Riverpebble, who stared back with the same look.

Thistlepaw whimpered.

They're scared of me.

Before she knew what she was doing, she ran towards the camp entrance as fast as she could. Yowls sounded from behind her but she didn't listen.

She ran through the entrance and through the dark forest as fast as she could. She didn't know where she was going, but she knew she couldn't stay there. She was a murderer.

She was a monster.

Chapter Thirteen

[image]

Brackenpaw padded determinedly towards the elders den. Ever since the mysterious meeting occurred, he had been trying to uncover the truth.

He knew something weird was going on that every cat seemed to know but him.

He reached the den and padded inside. Two cats sat in the middle, murmuring to each other silently. A light tabby tom with a long scar across his face, glanced up as Brackenpaw approached.

"Greetings, Halfface." Brackenpaw meowed to the scarred elder. "Claystripe." He nodded to the other light orange elder.

"Brackenpaw! What can we do for you?" Claystripe meowed.

Brackenpaw took a deep breath, going over what he planned to say in his head for the hundredth time.

"Actually I was just hoping to speak to both of you for a second."

The elders glanced at each other with a knowing look, causing Brackenpaw to raise an eyebrow suspiciously. When nether elder spoke, Brackenpaw sighed and continued.

"Lets just get to the point then. The meeting a few sunrises ago? Every cat seems to know what it was about but me. And no one is telling me anything."

Halfface bared his teeth, making Brackenpaw shudder as the elders half shredded lip curled up in a snarl.

"What?" The elder rasped. "And you expect us old cats to tell you everything?"

Claystripe nudged Halfface threateningly, but Halfface ignored him.

"I've heard murmurs that you have been going around camp asking every cat the same question. You young cats never learn to quit do you!"

Brackenpaw stared at the elder in surprise.

"Halfface- Claystripe began but the other elder interrupted him.

"No. You want to know the real truth, Brackenpaw? Learn to mind your own business and trust that Amberstar and the medicine cats know what they're doing. Some things are meant to stay in the dark, and when the time is right, the answers you are searching for will be reviled."

Halfface inched closer to the apprentice.

"But for now, train hard. Listen to your mentor. And just be a normal apprentice. While it lasts."

While it lasts?

"I think that's enough." Claystripe hissed lowly. "Run along now, Brackenpaw."

Brackenpaw nodded slowly before leaving the den.

Maybe the crazy old cat is right.... He thought. Maybe I should just focus on my training. Pebblepaw and Snowypaw both don't seem to know, and they aren't trying to uncover the truth.

He unsheathed his claws as he walked.

But they are hiding something from me too. Because I know for a fact that somehow I'm not their real kin.

"Brackenpaw!" Snowypaw yowled from nearby.

Brackenpaw turned to see the gray and white apprentice running towards him.

"Hawkfang told me to come and get you. We're going to meet Pebblepaw and her mentor at the training hallow for some battle training."

Brackenpaw glanced at the entrance of the camp to see Hawkfang and Owlwhisker waiting.

"I...okay."

Snowypaw glanced at him in concern.

"You okay?"

"Yup." He responded a little too quickly.

Snowypaw raised an eyebrow but didn't press the subject.

The two apprentices padded towards their mentors in silence, Brackenpaw silently glaring at his paws.
~
They reached the training hallow in no time, where Pebblepaw and Autumnleaf waited. The mentors nodded to each other before turning towards their apprentices.

"Today we're going to try something knew." Hawkfang meowed. "This is to not only test your durability skills, but how you choose to fight against an opponent who knows what moves you're going to make."

Pebblepaw rolled her eyes.

"I've beat both these mouse-brains countless of times. What makes this a challenge exactly?"

"Hey! It's been awhile since our last battle." Snowypaw hissed at his sister. "Me and Brackenpaw have both improved a lot."

"We'll see about that." Pebblepaw snickered.

"Enough." Hawkfang hissed. "What we're going to do is a tournament. First, two of you will battle each other, then the winner battles the next opponent and so on."

"Each of you will have a chance to battle each other." Owlwhisker meowed. "But when the cat who is sitting on the sidelines is watching, they can spot patterns in how the two cats battle. Giving them an advantage to whoever they fight against next."

"The catch is this." Autumnleaf purred. "The winner of every round has to keep going every time they win, testing their durability."

"So what you're saying is that if I lose, I can sit and catch my breath and get to fight against my next opponent with full energy?" Snowypaw asked.

"Yes." Hawkfang sighed.

Snowypaw glanced at Pebblepaw with a sneer.

"Well then. Let's begin." Autumnleaf meowed. "Pebblepaw. Pick your opponent."

Pebblepaw purred and glared at Snowypaw.

"Shall we?" She hissed with a smirk.

Snowypaw growled under his breath as he took his position in the middle of the hallow. Pebblepaw took her place a few tail lengths in front of him.

"Alright, Snowypaw. Since you were chosen, you get to choose your starting attack." Hawkfang meowed.

"Offence."Snowypaw growled.

"Very well, begin in three, two, one!"

Brackenpaw sat down and watched intently as Snowypaw leaped at Pebblepaw who swerved easily. She then struck a hard blow along his side as he turned. He huffed as the blow knocked the wind out of him and gasped as she rammed into his other side.

Snowypaw stumbled over his own paws, landing on his back. She pinned him and hissed in his face.

"Dead." She spat.

"Not yet I'm not!" Snowypaw yowled, kicking her belly with his hind legs.

She gasped and toppled over. Snowypaw scrambled to his paws awkwardly and before he could pin her, Pebblepaw leaped to her paws and trampled her brother to the ground. She pinned him with all her strength and after a few moments of struggling, Snowypaw sighed in defeat.

"Hmph." Pebblepaw mocked as she got off of him.

"Well done!" Owlwhisker purred.

Snowypaw growled to himself as he sat beside Brackenpaw.

"You tried your best." Brackenpaw joked.

Snowypaw rolled his eyes. "Good luck."

Brackenpaw rose to his paws and flicked his tail back in forth as he took his place in front of Pebblepaw.

"Lets see if you last longer then that mouse-brain." Pebblepaw joked.

Brackenpaw rolled his eyes, trying hard not to unsheathe his claws.

Lier...

He let that fuel his anger and strength.

I know your little secret...and since I'm not your kin...I don't have to hold back.

His anger was suddenly building up, everything he was keeping at the back of his mind was right in front of him.

"Alright. Pebblepaw, since you won, what battle position do you want?" Hawkfang meowed.

"Defense." She meowed steadily as she gazed at Brackenpaw's

glaring eyes in confusion.

"Okay then. Begin in three, two-

Brackenpaw leaped at Pebblepaw with anger, tackling her in surprise. The two cats rolled around on the ground, trying to pin one another. Pebblepaw scrambled free by kicking her hind legs out.

The two cats regained composure as they scrambled to their paws and began to circle each other.

"Couldn't even wait for Hawkfang to say one, huh?" Pebblepaw hissed.

Brackenpaw's glare hardened and he yowled, swiping his paw at her. While his paw was in the air, he unsheathed his claws in anger, striking her across the face. Pebblepaw yowled in pain as blood splattered the grass.

"Brackenpaw!" Owlwhisker yowled.

Pebblepaw turned to look at him, blood streaming down her cheek. She glared back before leaping at him.

Brackenpaws eyes widened as she pinned him. He gazed at the red dripping form her face in shock.

I hurt her...

He didn't struggle as she held him down.

"Dead." She hissed before getting off of him.

"Are you alright Pebblepaw?" Autumnleaf asked in worry.

"I'm fine." The apprentice hissed, glaring at Brackenpaw.

Brackenpaw rolled onto his paws silently, gazing at the ground.

"I think that's enough for the day..." Owlwhisker meowed before whispering to Autumnleaf. Brackenpaw pricked his ears in surprise

as he heard him whisper:

"I believe she's the one."

No one else seemed to have heard him and Brackenpaw glanced around in confusion.

"Lets head back to camp." Autumnleaf mumbled to Pebblepaw, nodding to Owlwhisker.

Snowypaw and Hawkfang padded out of the hallow, Snowypaw glancing at Brackenpaw with worry.

Brackenpaw began to follow before Owlwhisker stopped him.

"Brackenpaw. Maybe you should take a walk." He murmured in what seemed like a disappointed voice. "To...cool off." He hissed the last part before following the group out of the hallow.

Brackenpaw sighed and gazed at his paws. A little bit of blood was on his claws and he wiped it on the grass quickly.

Why did I do that?! Why did I unsheathe my claws?! I'm such a mouse-brain!

He sighed, gazing up at the tress.

I need to just..escape.

A thought appeared in his head, and he walked up to the nearest tree. He then leaped easily onto the trunk, scrambling up the tree with ease. He then perched himself onto a long branch. He looked down at the forest floor below him and sighed happily.

This is kinda...nice.

He then looked up at the closest tree to his.

Maybe if I leap high enough, I can make it to that branch.

Adrenaline rushed through him and he gathered his weight into his back legs before leaping as high as he could. He landed on the other

trees branch and purred.

That was incredible!

All of his worries seemed to drift away as he prepared to leap into the next tree. He leaped high, soaring through the air and landed easily onto the next tree branch. He then began to glide from tree to tree, branch to branch, with speed and agility he never knew he had. He felt for the first time in his entire life, free.

And for a few more moments, he forgot all of his worries and glided from tree to tree, until he reached the Thunderclan camp.

Chapter Fourteen

[image]

It's been a half moon since the battle. The weather was getting hotter, and prey was thriving. Yet the demeanor in the Riverclan camp was sorrow. Checkeredpaw's death affected everyone in the clan deeply.

Fernpaw considered him one of her closer friends. But out of every cat in the clan, Crowstar was the most devastated.

Although Sandfur was equally heart broken, she used her duties around the camp to distract herself. Mistpaw, Checkeredpaw's sister, did the same.

Crowstar though, he sat in his den all day every day. Gingerpelt would go into his den to speak with him from time to time, but gave up after awhile. Everyone assumes he's just a heart broken father. But Fernpaw believes he blames himself.

If this continues...Riverclan will spiral. We need our leader.

Fernpaw was sitting outside of the apprentice den, gazing up at the sky. It had been a hard day of training and she was exhausted. But she couldn't wait for the sun to go down. Tonight was a gathering. But she was worried that Crowstar wouldn't even bother coming.

What would that show Shadowclan? We mustn't seem weak at this time.

What was even weirder, was that she kept having the same dream over and over again. The shadow cats attacking Winclan. She couldn't help but wonder if Starclan was trying to tell her that Windclan was still in danger.

Fernpaw glanced up in surprise as Crowstar padded out of his den with Gingerpelt. Cats sitting around the camp murmured to each other as they watched the Riverclan leader climb up the Wetrock.

He sighed and gazed around the camp as the cats began to circle around the rock.

"As many of you know, we have a gathering tonight." The leader meowed. His voice was rough and dry. "I have chosen Rustyfur, Sagebreeze, Fishpelt, Twigpaw, Fernpaw, Shrewpaw, and Briarpaw to attend the gathering tonight."

Fernpaw purred lowly at the thought of attending her first gathering.

Crowstar looked up at the sky as the last bit of sunlight faded and the moon could be seen slowly rising.

"We will leave now." He meowed quietly and he leaped down from the rock.

The chosen cats began to file out of the camp, following Crowstar who was leaning steadily against Gingerpelt.

"Fernpaw!" Briarpaw meowed as she padded over to her, followed by Twigpaw and Shrewpaw.

"You exited for your first gathering?" Twigpaw asked with a purr.

Fernpaw nodded and glanced back at Crowstar.

"He looks pretty skinny doesn't he?" Briarpaw whispered, following her sisters gaze. "I hear he's not eating like, at all."

Fernpaw's ears laid back against her head and she shuddered.

"Though it seems like Mistpaw and Sandfur are handling it better." Briarpaw continued.

When Fernpaw didn't respond, she nudged her gently before starting a conversation with Shrewpaw.

Twigpaw padded closer to her as they crossed the scent markers into Windclan territory.

"You okay?" He meowed lowly.

Fernpaw blinked at him and forced a purr, pushing her worries to the back of her mind.

"Yeah. Just sorta worried about the gathering."

"Don't worry." The dark brown tom meowed. "Gingerpelt will make sure Crowstar stays in check.

Fernpaw nodded and held back a sigh.

Great Starclan I hope your right...

~

The group of Riverclan cats arrived at the four trees in no time, and they padded into the large clearing.

Fernpaw's fur stood on end as she spotted Windclan and Shadowclan cats.

Shadowclan...

She peered over the moving cats in front of her, trying to get a glimpse of Crowstar.

Please let him stay calm...

"Fernpaw, come on!" Briarpaw meowed as she followed Twigpaw and Shrewpaw over to a small group of Windclan apprentices.

Fernpaw held back another sigh as she followed her sister.

I forgot that at gatherings its usual for cats from every clan to converse.

She glanced at a group of Shadowclan warriors who glared back at her in response.

I guess not every cat...

"Fernpaw, Briarpaw, this is Ravenpaw and Branchpaw." Shrewpaw meowed. "We usually talk during gatherings."

Fernpaw nodded to the two apprentices and glanced at the two younger looking cats beside them.

"Oh, this is Featherpaw and Breezepaw." The black she, Fernpaw guessed was Ravenpaw, meowed. "They became apprentices about a moon and a half ago."

"So did we!" Briarpaw meowed in surprise.

Fernpaw narrowed her eyes as Branchpaw nudged Ravenpaw threateningly.

"Whats going on over there?" Fernpaw assumed was Featherpaw, asked. The apprentices followed her gaze as two groups of warriors from Riverclan and Shadowclan sat a few tail lengths away, hissing and glaring at each other.

Briarpaw glanced at Shrewpaw with a worried glance when suddenly Thunderclan padded down into the clearing.

Thank Starclan...

The clearing was now full of chattering cats as each cat from every clan meowed to each other. A few more minutes of aimless talking continued. The noise then subsided as the leaders appeared on top of the four branches coming from the the large tree in the middle of the clearing.

Fernpaw turned to look up at them but glanced at one of the younger apprentices, Breezepaw, who was staring right at her. She looked away quickly, trying to keep her eyes on the leaders.

Bearstar and Crowstar sat as far away from each other as Amberstar sat up.

"Its time for the gathering to begin!" She yowled, glancing up at the full moon. "Now I know there was a battle a half moon ago..." She meowed steadily, glancing at Crowstar. "But I must remind all of you that under no circumstance will a fight break out tonight. As you know, it is forbidden."

She glanced at the other leaders.

"Would any of you like to report first?"

Falconstar sat forward immediately.

"Yes. Windclan would." His voice shook a little.

The Windclan cats begun to shift uncomfortably as Falconstar continued.

"A half moon ago..." He glanced at Crowstar. "We received a threat."

Amberstar gazed at him in confusion.

"A threat?"

"Yes. My deputy, Ivyclaw, was on a patrol when she found cats blood smeared on a tree in our territory. She followed the scent to the barn."

"The barn where that group of rouges were allowed to live in?" Bearstar meowed.

"Yes." Falconstar huffed irritatedly. "Inside the barn...most of the rouges were gone but...we found three of them..." He paused, steading his voice before he continued. "Dead. In a pile. But their bones were...twisted and broken brutally."

Cats from each clan gasped in horror and murmurs rose from the crowd as cats glanced at each other in anger and fear.

Great Starclan... Fernpaw thought as bile rose in her throat.

"Thats awful..." Briarpaw whispered.

"Its obvious that whoever or...whatever...did this, was trying to threaten us." Falconstar yowled over the murmurs. "Threatening us saying that we're next."

The two other leaders glanced at each other in worry. Amberstar whispered something to Falconstar who nodded darkly. Her eyes widened and she glanced at Bearstar who also nodded. Crowstar just sat, looking ahead with narrowed eyes.

More murmurs sounded from the crowd as the leaders whispered to

each other.

"Whats going on up there?" Ravenpaw huffed.

Amberstar then turned back to the crowd and yowled loudly, silencing the crowds chatter.

"This is...deeply unsettling news." The Thunderclan leader meowed, glancing at Falconstar. "And we definitely cannot ignore this like it's nothing." She gazed down at the crowd and took a deep breath. "Because we've been expecting this."

Expecting this?

"A battle is coming." She continued. "And we cannot be fighting with each other when it occurs."

Crowstar glared ahead, unsheathing his claws and digging them into his branch.

"Its time that..." Amberstar looked at each leader who nodded in return. "Its time we tell you everything we know."

The silence was unbearable.

"I'm sure most of you have heard rumors of a prophecy." Bearstar meowed. "The truth is, all four of us have been meeting each other at the moon stone to try and figure out what the prophecy means."

Thats what those meetings were about?

Fernpaw glanced at Briarpaw who stared back with equal confusion.

"We received this prophecy on the night of the first battle between Riverclan and Shadowclan." Falconstar meowed.

"The prophecy was..." He paused, waiting for the clearing to be dead silent. "Leaf fall will destroy the clans. Unless the four born on the battle of dark and light can unite, and use what they have been given. Only four will save the clans."

Murmurs rose again.

"Thanks to the help of our medicine cats," Amberstar yowled. "We figured out what most of it means"

The leaders glanced at each other hesitantly, Crowstar surprisingly looking them in the eyes for the first time.

"The battle between dark and light was the battle between Shadowclan and Riverclan." Falconstar yowled. "And we know this because...four litters were born that night. From each clan."

Fernpaw's eyes widened and she glanced at Briarpaw who's ears were pinned back. Fernpaw then glanced around until she spotted Mudpaw beside Pearlfeather with the other medicine cats.

He gazed back at her with equal confusion. To Fernpaw's surprise, Breezepaw and Featherpaw shared the same look with each other.

"Thats when we realized that the four born on the battle between dark and light would save us all." Falconstar continued. "One cat, from each clan, was chosen by Starclan."

Fernpaw sat frozen in shock as she stared at the leaders.

"We know most of you already know all of this." Bearstar huffed. "But because of this threat...we've decided we must take action." His eyes scanned the crowd. "Its time for the chosen ones training to really begin."

Briarpaw nudged Fernpaw.

"You don't think..."

"We've been analyzing these litters since they were kits. And I believe we each have an idea of who the chosen ones are."

Amberstar meowed. "We believe Starclan has gifted them enhanced abilities of some sort to help fight back against this threat."

Amberstar nodded to Falconstar who sat up.

"We want you all to know that there is hope. And that we will begin training the chosen ones immediately. Hopefully together."

A gray and white tom stood up from a group of Winclan warriors and yowled up at the leaders.

"Who are these *chosen ones?* Who is destined to save us exactly?"

Yowls from every clan rose, shouting in agreement. The leaders glanced at each other before whispering something. A few moments passed before Falconstar yowled and the crowd was quiet again.

"Very well. We weren't sure if we should announce this so...publicly, but we have hidden enough from all of you. You have a right to know."

Falconstar huffed as he stepped forward. "The chosen one from Windlcan is..." His eyes scanned the crowd before they landed on the Windclan apprentices behind Fernpaw. "Breezepaw." He yowled.

Fernpaw turned to see Breezepaw's eyes widen in shock as he gazed at his sister. Yowls from the Windclan cats erupted and Falconstar silenced them quickly. Amberstar then stepped forward and took a deep breath.

"We believe the chosen one from Thunderclan is...Pebblepaw."

More yowls sounded. Amberstar nudged Crowstar who nodded shakily.

Fernpaw gazed at her leader as her heart pounded in her chest.

This isn't happening.

"The chosen one from Riverclan is..." His voiced rasped and his eyes landed right on hers.

No...

"Fernpaw."

Briarpaw's gaze landed on hers and it seemed like all eyes were

suddenly on Fernpaw. Her heart skipped a beat and she stared at Crowstar in horror.

I can't be...they must be mistaken.

But it made since. She was receiving multiple messages from Starclan. And she could swim faster than an warrior only when she was a kit. It was obvious that she wasn't a regular apprentice.

Bearstar then stepped froward. He almost seemed...nervous.

"The chosen one from Shadowclan is..." He glanced at Crowstar. "Thistlepaw."

Crowstar's dim eyes suddenly erupted into fire as he turned on the Shadowclan leader.

"What?!" He yowled.

Yowls sounded from the Riverclan section.

"I know how it sounds- Bearstar started.

"How it sounds is that your are saying a murderer is destined to save the clans!" Crowstar interrupted.

"It wasn't murder!" Bearstar hissed. "It was an accident! We believe she has the gift of enhanced strength. She doesn't know her power!"

Silence followed.

Crowstar stared at the ground in fury.

He understands... Fernpaw thought. *He knows Bearstar is right. But his anger is ruining his judgement.*

"The thing is..." Bearstar huffed. "After the battle...Thistlepaw left Shadowclan. No cat has seen or heard from her since."

Crowstar's eyes widened and he looked up at the Shadowclan leader in shock.

"But we need to find her." Bearstar continued. "We know for a fact

that she is the chosen one. How else was she able to kill you?"

Crowstar's gaze hardened and he sighed before nodding sharply.

"We will keep a look out for her." Amberstar meowed and Falconstar nodded. "I don't believe after this we have anything more to say?"

The leaders nodded before she yowled to the crowd.

"This concludes this gathering!"

The cats slowly began to disperse and Briarpaw padded beside Fernpaw silently. Cats eyes were boring into her, and she kept her eyes on the ground as she followed her clan out of the clearing.

I'm one of the chosen ones...

She shuddered and held back a whimper.

Every cat will be putting their hope into me...but...what if I can't do it? I'm only an apprentice! What if I fail...?

Her eyes narrowed and she unsheathed her claws as she walked.

No. I won't fail. I can't fail. Whatever is coming...I'll make sure I'm more then ready when we face this threat. For Riverclan. For every *clan.*

Chapter Fifteen

[image]

It's been a quarter moon since the gathering. And every cat in Thunderclan was acting as if nothing had changed.

Brackenpaw sat at the entrance to the apprentice den, glaring as cats did their usual duties around the camp. Over the last couple of sunrises, Pebblepaw and Autumnleaf trained ever day at the four trees with the other chosen ones.

Apparently Shadowclan still hasn't found Thistlepaw, causing only three of the chosen ones to continue training.
Brackenpaw had no idea what sort of training they were doing, but apparently it was intense. Every time Pebblepaw returned at sunset, she looked exhausted.

Brackenpaw sighed at the thought of the she-cat. She still refused to speak with him since he struck her at training.

I've apologized to her numerous times and she still refuses to accept it!

He hissed under his breath and gazed up at the sky where the sun shined high. Greenleaf was officially here.

The only other interesting things that had occurred since the gathering was the news of Doefoot now expecting kits with her mate Mossclaw. And a few sunrises ago was Silentpaw, Sunpaw, and Skypaw's warrior assessment. They apparently passed easily and were getting there warrior names any moment now.

Brackenpaw sighed.

Why did the leaders announce the chosen ones in front of all of the clans? Pebblepaw has been a reck since the gathering.

An idea struck him as he glanced at the elders den.

The elders will know the leaders way of thinking better than anyone in Thunderclan.

He began to pad towards the den, his tail in the air.

Hopefully they will be more helpful then they were last time I asked for answers...

Halfface and Claystripe were sitting outside their den, speaking to each other quietly.

"Brackenpaw. I had a feeling you would be back." Halfface meowed as the apprentice approached.

"Halfface." Brackenpaw huffed, dipping his head in greeting. "I had...a few questions to ask you both."

Halfface rolled his eyes and flicked his tail for him to continue.

"The leaders. Why did they tell all of the clans who the chosen ones are? They do realize how that impacted Pebblepaw?"

"Pebblepaw? Aren't you both not speaking to each other?" Claystripe meowed confusedly.

Brackenpaw turned to the other elder with a raised eyebrow.

"How did you know we aren't talking?"

"Us elders observe very closely when we sit around all day." Halfface purred.

"Well...I'm worried about her." Brackenpaw huffed.

There was a few moments of silence until Claystripe spoke up.

"Their scared, Brackenpaw. The leaders."

Brackenpaw blinked in surprise.

"Scared? But they're leaders of their clans! What could they possibly be scared of?"

The two elders glanced at each other before Claystripe nodded.

"Brackenpaw, tell me." Halfface meowed. "Have you ever heard of the...Great Battle?" The elder whispered the last part, glancing around the camp.

"The Great Battle?" Brackenpaw meowed.

"Keep your voice down!" Claystripe hissed.

Brackenpaw raised an eyebrow but stayed quiet.

"The Great Battle happened many many moons ago..." Halfface continued. "Most cats alive today have no idea what it is because those who have lived through it, never speak of it."

"Did...did you both live through it?" Brackenpaw asked.

"We were young warriors at the time." Claystripe meowed. "Amberstar was only a deputy. The leader at the time was a powerful she-cat named Nightstar."

"The battle started small..." Halfface whispered. "But soon grew as little arguments between the clans became intense and brutal battles."

"It was every clan for themselves." Claystripe shuddered. "The battles between each clan were endless. Whenever a battle concluded between two clans, another clan weould attack the clan that lost in hope to win. It didn't matter anymore what the battles were about. Every cat was just hungry for a win. At that point nobody knew how it all started in the first place."

"Many cats were slaughtered." Halfface stared at his paws. "Including half of my face."

There was a pause before Claystripe continued.

"After awhile, the leaders decided that that battle must come to an end. They agreed that too many lives had been lost and they decided to put all grudges and past arguments to rest. The clans were at peace for many moons after that."

"Until the battle between dark and light." Halfface hissed. "And the leaders became afraid that the Great Battle would reoccur."

Halfface looked up, looking Brackenpaw straight in the eyes.

"It was a blood bath. It was a terrible time for the clans. The leaders are terrified that this battle that is destined to happen will somehow lead to a similar Great Battle. Wether that's between the clans or against these mysterious foes that threatened Windclan."

Claystripe sighed and rested his tail on Halfface's shoulder.

"I hope you got the answer you were looking for Brackenpaw, but I think that's enough storytelling for today." He dipped his head to the apprentice before leading the now shaking elder into the den.

The Great Battle...so that's why the leaders are being so pushy with the chosen ones. They're afraid.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here beneath the Highrock for a clan meeting!" Amberstar yowled from the top of the Highrock.

I guess its warrior ceremony time...

He padded over to the rock as the cats around the camp began to gather. He glanced around, wondering if Pebblepaw was back from training for the ceremony. He sighed as he realized she was probably still out there and spotted Snowypaw near the other apprentices.

Snowypaw's eyes landed on his and he quickly looked away.

So he's still mad at me too. Great.

Shadowblaze rushed through the crowd, taking her place on the deputy rock.

Amberstar gazed down at the three apprentices near Snowypaw proudly.

"Today, three brave apprentices are ready to receive their warrior

names." She then looked up at the sky. "I, Amberstar, leader of Thunderclan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as a warrior in their turn."

Her eyes then gazed down at the apprentices again.

"Silentpaw, Skypaw, and Sunpaw. Do all of you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

All three apprentices nodded determinedly, meowing "I do."

Amberstar purred. "Then by the powers of Starclan, I give you your warrior names. Silentpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Silentwhisper. Skypaw, from this day forward you will be known as Skyfall. And Sunpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Sunpelt. Starclan honors each of your bravery, strength, and kindness, and we welcome all of you as full fledged warriors of Thunderclan."

Yowls erupted from the crowd as the cats chanted the new warriors names.

"Silentwhisper! Skyfall! Sunpelt!"

The three new warriors gazed around proudly as their former mentors purred beside them.

The sun then slowly began to set and Amberstar yowled over the noise.

"Tonight, the three of you shall sit a silent vigil as you guard our camp for the night."

The three warriors nodded and took their places at the camp entrance. By now, the sun was behind the mountains and the light was dim as night began to fall. Brackenpaw rushed to his paws as he spotted Pebblepaw and Autumnleaf enter the camp.

"Pebblepaw!" He huffed as he reached her.

She looked him up and down and sighed.

"What do you want?"

He sighed and began to speak but was interrupted by Autumnleaf.

"Sorry Brackenpaw, but we're trying to go on a last minute night patrol."

He raised an eyebrow in confusion.

"But you just got back from training!"

"We did some trust training today." Pebblepaw sighed rolling her eyes. "Which means we practically just sat around all day. I want to stretch my legs before I sleep. I gotta stay in shape you know. Now if you don't mind." She glared at him.

"I-

"Brackenpaw!" Owlwhisker padded over quickly and nudged him with his shoulder. "I heard the word night patrol and thought we could tag along with you."

Autumnleaf shrugged. "Sure, the more the merrier." She purred as Pebblepaw glared daggers.

"Lets go then!" Owlwhisker purred.

The four cats padded out of the camp and Owlwhisker pulled Brackenpaw back a few paw steps.

"Talk with her." He whispered. "You two need to sort this out. It might be affecting her training because it certainly is affecting yours."

Brackenpaw sighed. "She won't talk to me."

"Just try." Owlwhisker hissed. "Why do you think we're out here right now?"

Brackenpaw growled under his breath and padded to Pebblepaw's

side.

"Autumnleaf! A word please?" Owlwhisker meowed from behind. The she-cat purred and joined him, leaving Brackenpaw and Pebblepaw alone.

That meddling mouse brain... Brackenpaw thought to himself.

He glanced at Pebblepaw who was glaring ahead.

"Pebblepaw...I know apologizing again won't do anything but...I *am* sorry. I don't know what got into me that day. I guess I was just...angry."

She looked at him and hissed. "Is it because I'm one of the chosen ones? Because if it is, trust me it's not as glorious as it seems."

Brackenpaw shook his head. "No, of course not! I'm just..." He sighed.

Nothing will make her stop hating me unless I tell her the real truth.

He gazed at the she-cat sadly.

"I know." He whispered.

She glanced at him confusedly.

"What?"

He took a deep breath and stared at his paws.

"I know I'm not your real kin."

There was a long silence.

"Oh..." she finally meowed.

"So you knew?" Brackenpaw hissed, trying to keep his anger down.

"Not until recently. The first meeting at four trees for battle training I asked Autumnleaf if she was sure I was the one.

And she said they knew it couldn't be Snowypaw because its...well Snowypaw." She joked. "But also because...you're rouge born."

Rouge born...so that's what I'm called.

"I'm so sorry, Brackenpaw. I should have told you the second I found out. But I was so angry thinking you struck me because you thought I was a prophecy cat that-

"Pebblepaw. I kinda figured it out when we were kits."

She glanced at him in surprise. "Really?"

"Its a long story." He purred.

There was a silence as the cats padded through the now dark forest.

"Lets just promise no more secrets." Pebblepaw meowed. "And Brackenpaw?"

Brackenpaw's eyes met hers.

"Just know that no matter what, I will always think of you as my brother. Through and through."

Brackenpaw purred and nudged her playfully.

"Pebblepaw, don't get soft on me!"

She purred back.

"No I'm serious!" She paused again. "I...love you. You *are* my family."

Brackenpaw's breath caught in his throat.

Family...

"Hey! I think I smell something over here." Autumnleaf meowed from behind them. They turned to see her smelling a large berry bush.

"I'm not entirely sure because it seems to be masked by the scent of

these crushed berries, but I definitely smell fox."
The she-cat meowed.

Owlwhisker padded over to the bush and sniffed it.

"All I smell are berries." He huffed.

"Oh it's defiantly here." Autumnleaf meowed, wrinkling her nose. "Your nose must be broken, Owlwhisker."

"My nose *has* been stuffy recently..." The tom sighed.

"I should follow the scent and make sure it's not in the territory anymore." Autumnleaf huffed.

"I'll come too." Pebblepaw meowed, padding up to her mentor. "You shouldn't go alone. Just in case it's still here."

Owlwhisker nodded. "Alright then. Me and Brackenpaw will continue the patrol. We'll meet you both back at camp."
Both cats nodded and Pebblepaw purred at Brackenpaw.

"I'm honestly glad we figured this out." She meowed to him. "I missed our little chats."

"You mean the chats we have as you make fun of me or Snowypaw?" Brackenpaw joked.

"Shut up, you mouse brain." She purred as she padded into the brush with Autumnleaf.

Same old Pebblepaw...

"Well I'm glad this all worked out." Owlwhisker purred.

Brackenpaw rolled his eyes, glancing up at the trees.

"Do you see that?" He whispered suddenly as he spotted a large bird perched in a nearby tree branch.

Owlwhisker crouched low and nodded. Brackenpaw creeped toward the nearest tree and began to stalk up the branch.

"You can't be serious." Owlwhisker whispered. "Theres no way you can leap that distance and tackle that big of a bird."

"Watch me." Brackenpaw huffed as he reached the first branch.

Now that he had worked out things with Pebblepaw, his mind seemed completely free of worry. He crouched low and prepared to leap into the next tree. He did it easily, soaring through the air and landing on the branch quietly.

He was now closer to the oblivious bird and he crouched again before leaping swiftly through the air, tackling the bird. He bit into its neck before landing on the next tree branch.

"Great Starclan!" Owlwhisker yowled in surprise as Brackenpaw scrambled easily down from the tree, the bird in his jaws.

"How did you do that?"

Brackenpaw dropped his prey.

"Do what?

"No cat could jump that high, far, or easily as you just did." Owlwhisker murmured in surprise and he gazed at him with narrowed eyes.

Brackenpaw raised an eyebrow at his mentor.

"Owlwhisker-

Suddenly a loud yowl sounded from the trees, followed by screeching.

"What was that?!" Brackenpaw hissed.

There was a silence until another yowl of pain sounded.

"Autumnleaf." Owlwhisker hissed before sprinting in the direction the two she-cats had left.

Fear set into Brackenpaw as he followed his mentor. The two toms

sprinted over rocks and brush, following the scent of the two she-cats. More yowls sounded, and as they continued running, the yowls began to form into words.

"Help! Owlwhisker! I need help! HELP!"

Brackenpaw pushed harder to keep up with his mentor until they emerged into a small clearing. Brackenpaw's heart dropped as he spotted Autumnleaf crouched over something, shuddering violently.

Owlwhisker sprinted over to her only to yowl in surprise.

"Autumnleaf, what happened?!"

The she-cat gazed up at him shakily. Her shoulder was bleeding badly from what looked like a bite wound.

"It was...it was a fox...it came and Pebblepaw she..."

Brackenpaw inched closer to where the she-cat was crouched. He padded slowly as if he already knew what he was going to see.

"She jumped at it right away and it...it struck her and pinned her and I..." Autumnleaf shuddered again and Owlwhisker placed his head on hers, his eyes wide.

Brackenpaw reached the two cats and padded around them before staring in shock at Pebblepaw's limp body. Blood poured deeply out of her neck and her eyes stared at nothing.

"I'm so sorry..." Autumnleaf continued. "I...I couldn't save her..."

Brackenpaw fell to his paws and let out a yowl.

"Pebblepaw!" He shrieked and nudged her with his nose. "No no no...it can't be...wake up Pebblepaw! You have to wake up!" He shuddered violently as he nudged her again. "Wake up Pebblepaw...you have to wake up now..." He whimpered and he buried his face into her cold fur.

"Brackenpaw..." Owlwhisker murmured lightly. "She's gone..."

Brackenpaw squeezed his eyes shut. "No no...you don't understand we were finally speaking now...I spoke with her only a few moments ago...she forgave me...I forgave her..."

Silence followed as he whimpered.

Pebblepaw you can't be gone...it was finally back to the way it was...you can't go...your my family...my sister.

Chapter Sixteen

[image]

The warm wind blew through Breezepaw's fur as he padded beside Waspclaw into the Fourtrees clearing.
Fernpaw was sitting beside her mentor Sagebreeze.

"Greetings." Sagebreeze purred as the two toms approached.

Waspclaw nodded in return before flicking his tail annoyingly.

"Were late. So where is Thunderclan?" He hissed.

"You mean Pebblepaw and Autumnleaf?" Fernpaw growled back.

Every day she becomes more and more feisty. Breezepaw thought to himself.

He gazed at the white and light brown she-cat intently, looking her up and down. Her eyes suddenly landed on his and she raised an eyebrow. He quickly looked away.

"We've waited long enough." Waspclaw growled, glaring at Fernpaw. "Lets begin."

Sagebreeze sighed before nodding.

"I guess since no one else is here we can do a quick battle session to keep your skills sharp." Waspclaw meowed.

"Didn't we just do trust training yesterday, and now you want us to fight each other?" Fernpaw huffed.

Waspclaw turned on the she-cat with a glare.

"That doesn't mean you can't use each other for training. Don't apprentices from your clan use each other for training? How is this any different?"

Fernpaw gazed at her paws.

"Thats what I thought." Waspclaw growled.

"Lets just begin." Sagebreeze sighed.

Fernpaw padded to an open space of grass and Breezepaw followed, taking his place in front of her.

"You'll find it easier if you just keep your mouth shut around him." Breezepaw whispered to her.

She raised an eyebrow at him again silently.

"And I'll be sure to take it easy on you." He smirked.

Fernpaws eyes then narrowed.

"Don't you dare." She hissed. "I can take whatever mediocre fighting skills you have to offer. I've seen you fight Pebblepaw. It wasn't that impressive if I'm being honest."

"I beat her." Breezepaw purred in amusement.

"You haven't fought *me* yet." Fernpaw growled. "So you don't even know what I'm capable of."

"Sure. Whatever you say." Breezepaw smirked.

"Lets get a move on!" Waspclaw hissed a few cat lengths away.

"You heard him." Fernpaw smirked.

Breezepaw gazed into her bright green eyes, his amusement fading. It felt like an eternity until Fernpaw turned away, padding a few paw steps.

"Alright. Begin in three, two, one!" Sagebreeze yowled.

Fernpaw leaped at him as soon as her mentor yowled one and Breezepaw swerved her easily. She jumped at him again, and with easy speed, Breezepaw jumped out of the way just in time. She turned on him and hissed in frustration.

"What? You're just gonna swerve me the entire time?" She mocked.

Breezepaw purred before sprinting towards her. Before she had time to react, he swiped his paws under hers, knocking her over. He placed a paw on her side gently.

"Gotcha." He purred.

She raised an eyebrow before biting into his paw, not hard enough for him to bleed, but enough for him to yowl in surprise, jumping away from her.

"Ow!" He hissed, smirking slightly.

She purred before walking slowly towards him.

"What? Do you want me to lick it better?" She smirked.

His eyes widened as he gazed at her silently. Suddenly she leaped at him and pinned him down.

"Hey! You...distracted me." He hissed as he tried to scramble free.

"Anything can happen on the battle field." Fernpaw purred. "You have to be ready for anything."

"Well done, Fernpaw." Sagebreeze purred.

"Next time, less talking." Waspclaw hissed, glaring at Breezepaw.

Breezepaw glanced at his paws as Fernpaw let him up.

"Well there's nothing else we can really do." Sagebreeze meowed. "Lets just call it a day."

Waspclaw nodded before turning towards the way out of Fourtrees, into Windclan territory. Breezepaw began to follow before turning to watch Fernpaw pad the opposite direction with Sagebreeze. She turned and met his gaze.

"Breezepaw!' Waspclaw meowed annoyingly.

He quickly dragged his eyes away from the she-cat before sprinting

to catch up with his mentor.

~

The two toms padded into camp and Breezepaw raised his head higher. Ever since the clan found out he was the chosen one, he hadn't felt more special in his entire life. Everyone adored him, whispering how he was destined to save the clans.

And best of all, he finally was better than Featherpaw. This whole time every cat thought the chosen one was her. But Falconstar saw something in Breezepaw. Though he mainly just saw how fast he was compared to every cat.

"Breezepaw!" Featherpaw raced up to them. "Your back early?"

He nodded and smirked at her. "Yup. We've been training so hard that-

"Thunderclan didn't show up." Waspclaw growled, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, well you're just in time!" Featherpaw meowed excitedly. "Sprucekit is having his apprentice ceremony!"

Breezepaw's eyes widened as he glanced at the Tallrock where Falconstar stood, gazing down at Sprucekit.

"Come on!" Featherpaw purred, rushing over.

Breezepaw followed, pushing through the crowd until they got the front.

"From this day forward until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Sprucepaw." Falconstar meowed.

"Your mentor shall be Aspenberry."

Aspenberry purred and padded over to the apprentice, touching her nose to his.

"She is a brave and kind warrior. I'm sure she will pass down all she knows to you." Falconstar purred. "Clan dismissed!"

Breezepaw padded over to Sprucepaw and nudged him gently.

"Congrats!" He purred. "Your finally an apprentice."

Sprucepaw purred up at him. "Yeah but I'll never be like you! You're a chosen one!"

"Alright. How about we go out on a border patrol and I show you around the territory?" Aspenberry purred.

Breezepaw padded away, leaving Sprucepaw to enjoy his first day as an apprentice.

A chosen one. He thought to himself with a smirk. That's right. I'm a chosen one. And I'll be the one to save the clans.

To save everyone.

~

Breezepaw sighed as he was woken up by the sound of clumsy paw steps walking into the apprentice den. It was late at night and the moon shined high in the sky. The moon was bright enough to spread moonlight into the den, allowing Breezepaw to see Sprucepaw padding to an empty nest. Sprucepaw met his gaze and blinked apologetically.

"Did I wake you? Sorry, I was on a late night patrol. Aspenberry was showing me around the territory and-

"Sorry, Sprucepaw, but I really don't care." Breezepaw huffed tiredly.

"Right. Sorry." The apprentice whispered, gazing at his paws as he laid quickly in his nest. "Goodnight, Breezepaw."

Breezepaw sighed and rolled his eyes.

"Night."

He then closed his eyes slowly as silence crept over the den once again, and his breathing began to slow as sleep drifted over him.

~

"WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!!!"

Breezepaws eyes snapped open as a yowl of fear sounded from

outside the den. The other apprentices sat up quickly as screeches began to sound.

"Attack?!" Sprucepaw whimpered. "But-

"Quickly!" Ravenpaw interrupted as she and Branchpaw sprinted out of the den. Featherpaw glanced at Breezepaw horridly before following.

"Breezepaw!" Sprucepaw yowled as he began to follow his sister.

The young apprentice looked small and scared, and was shaking slightly.

He hasn't had even one day of training yet. For all its worth, he's practically still a kit. He can't fight.

"Stay here and don't move." Breezepaw huffed and his ears pricked as a loud yowl sounded upon the screeches outside.

"But-

"Your not ready to fight, Sprucepaw. Stay *here*."

Sprucepaw nodded and Breezepaw turned on his heels, sprinting out of the den. His eyes widened in shock and horror at what he saw.

Large, ferocious cats were all around the camp. Leaping at his clanmates and tearing them apart. They were definitely not clan cats. They were rouges.

That scent...

He pinned his ears back in surprise.

The barn. The threat. It was these *cats.*

He stared in horror as he spotted blood splattered on rocks and grass, and limp bodies of unidentified Windclan cats lay motionless on the ground.

And now they're fulfilling their threat .

Suddenly, the wind was knocked out of him as a large cat leaped at him, pinning him to the ground. The cat had large fangs and a crooked muzzle, and its breath smelled like death.

Breezepaw yowled a battle cry before kicking the large cat off of him with his hind legs. The cat stumbled a little before leaping again. Breezepaw swerved easily, using his speed, and continued to swerve as the cat continued to lunge.

The cat soon became frustrated and tired, and yowled in anger. Using that, Breezepaw swiped his paw underneath the cats legs, causing it to topple over.

He pinned it down and hissed in its face.

"Its over! I won. Now leave!"

The cat sneered up at him.

"Thats not how we do things, clan scum. That mouse brained warrior code won't help you now. You have to finish me."

The cats eyes widened mockingly.

"Go on! Do it! Kill me!"

Breezepaw's eyes widened in shock.

"KILL ME YOU CLAN SCUM!" The cat laughed. "DO IT!"

Suddenly a yowl sounded, and Breezepaw looked up, following the noise. It came from the Tallrock, where a large white cat, with blood covering its fur, stood with a limp body hanging from its jaws like prey.

Falconstar...

The white cat dropped the leader, who struggled to stand up. Falconstar had scratches all over his body, and a large gash on his shoulder. It almost looked like an entire hunk of flesh had been torn

from his body.

Breezepaw shuddered in horror as the white cat yowled again, causing the fighting all around the camp to come to a sudden halt. As Breezepaw looked around, he noticed how defeated his clan was. All of the rouge attackers gazed up at the white cat, and Breezepaw assumed it was their leader.

"Cats of Windclan!" The white cat yowled, and the camp was suddenly very quiet.

The rouge underneath Breezepaw's paws scrambled free, hissing silently.

"My name is Shade." The cats voice sound sickeningly calm. "I am the second in command of The Tribe of Leaf Bare."

Leaf Bare...?

Windclan cats began to hiss and yowl, and the white cat sighed. Shade placed a long clawed paw on the top of Falconstars head, digging his claws into his face slowly. The leader began to yowl in pain, but stayed limp. The leaders pain caused the hissing to subdue quickly.

"Falconstar!" Ivyclaw yowled from somewhere among the camp. Her yowl was cut short as a hiss sounded, and a whimper of pain followed.

Shade sighed again, shaking his head slowly.

"This does not have to be difficult." He huffed, lifting his paw from Falconstars head. "We don't want more valuable lives to be waisted." His gaze raked the silent camp. "I've heard much about the clans." He hissed. "And here I am. Standing in Windclan camp." He paused and a loud purr escaped him. "And let me say I am not impressed!"

Laughs and purrs from the rouges sounded around the camp.

"I thought taking over the camp would be much harder than this!" Shade laughed jokingly.

Breezepaw glared up at the white cat.

"You haven't taken our camp!" A yowl sounded from somewhere. More yowls of agreement sounded from Windclan cats and Breezepaw nodded determinedly.

"Is that so?" Shade hissed, all amusement gone. "Look around!" He yowled. "Your friends, perhaps even your kin, lie dead in front of you."

Breezepaw gazed around intently, and he gasped as he spotted silver fur lying motionless on the ground a few paw steps away form him.

Silverleaf...

A yowl of grief sounded from behind him, and he whipped around to see Ravenpaw crouched beside a limp body of dark gray fur.

Branchpaw...

He stumbled on his paws as he realized his friend was dead.

No...

Another yowl sounded, and Breezepaw's breath caught in his throat.

That was Featherpaw's yowl.

He looked around anxiously before he spotted his sister whimpering over a pile of white fur near the nursery.

No...

He pushed through the crowd of cats, gazing up at Shade silently as he reached his sister. He padded around her to see the limp cats face and he shrieked in agony as he recognized the body.

Swanstrike...

He whimpered into Featherpaws shoulder before looking up with daggers for eyes as Shade continued.

"You see?" The white cat whispered calmly. "You've lost. Maybe even lost more than you needed to." He bared his teeth at Falconstar, who still laid limp on the rock. "And this, this is what you call a leader?! This-

With his paw he lifted Falconstar's head up, making the leaders half open eyes stare down at his helpless clan.

"This is pathetic!" Shade hissed, letting the leaders head drop again. "That is only one of the reasons why we are here. And soon, everything will be explained. But for now, Windclan is ours. And you can ether join peacefully, or...your so called leader here is going to die a slow and painful death."

Yowls from the Windclan cats rose from the crowd and Breezepaw gazed at Shade with hatred.

Swanstrike is dead...but I have to do something. I'm still the chosen one.

"Its your choice!" Shade yowled over the noise.

Falconstar raised his head.

"Don't...listen..." The leader started before Shade interrupted.

"My patience is officially gone!" The white cat hissed. He then bared his teeth before sinking them into Falconstars neck.

The camp was suddenly silent as the Windclan cats stared in horror as Shade retracted his teeth from the leaders throat, taking a large piece of flesh with him. He spitted it out, blood dripping from his lips as he watched as Falconstar gurgle a little, before sighing, and becoming still.

You fool! He has six lives left! Breezepaw thought.

Suddenly, Falconstars body twitched and light flooded in his eyes, but the light quickly dimmed, and he gurgled again before becoming still.

What...just happened?

Shade purred in amusement.

"You don't think we haven't heard of your leaders having nine lives? Don't worry. I made sure that every life this pathetic choice of a leader receives is quickly lost."

Cats yowled in horror as Falconstars eyes continued to light up, then die.

"Falconstar!" Cats yowled in agony as they watched helplessly, their leader dying five more times, until he reached his last life.

Silence fell over the camp, and all hope left Breezepaw's body.

"Your leader is *dead*!" Shade yowled. "Give up."

Breezepaw gazed around as Windclan cats began to bow their heads in defeat, most of them had large wounds, and his eyes landed on Waspclaw, who had a large scratch down his face. His head was bowed.

Breezepaw glanced down at Featherpaw who was still whimpering into her mothers cold fur.

This was it...the threat that Starclan had warned us about...and we lost.

He bowed his head as well, and gazed at his paws.

"Very good." Shade meowed before pushing Falconstars body off of the rock. It landed on the ground with a sickeningly thump, causing Breezepaw to wince.

"You all are now apart of The Tribe of Leaf Bare. The rules are simple. None of you shall leave this camp. All hunting will be done by my fellow rouges. You will only be allowed to eat if I say you can. All wounds may be treated by your so called medicine cats, who will be watched constantly by a selected few. The consequence of breaking any of these rules is simple. Death."

Shade glanced around the camp slowly.

"Now. Which of you goes by the name, Breezepaw?"

Chapter Seventeen

[image]

Fernpaw crouched low in the tall grass as she watched the shadowed cats streak into the Windclan camp. Her dream then shifted like it always did, and she was suddenly inside the camp walls. Cats were screeching and fighting all around her, and she watched helplessly, her paws frozen to the ground.

But suddenly, her dream shifted again, and she was in a dark den. It smelled like death, and she gagged as the stench wafted into her nose.

She looked around horridly, and stepped back, only to be met with a loud crunch. She turned to see she had stepped on a motionless body, its eyes staring at nothing. She gasped in terror as she realized the body was beside a pile of corpses.

"Help me, Fernpaw..."

She screeched and whipped around to see a dark figure crouched in the corner of the den. She padded closer slowly, and the figure was reviled.

"Breezepaw?!" She gasped.

Breezepaw's nose was bleeding and scratches lined his sides. His ears were badly torn and a long scratch covered half of his face. But his eyes...his eyes were full of terror.

"Help me, Fernpaw..." He whimpered again.

"I will, just hold on!" Fernpaw yowled, trying to reach him but her paws were frozen to the ground again.

"I will, Breezepaw!" She yowled again.

Her vision began to blur and she yowled in surprise as the ground

gave way underneath her, and she was free falling into nothingness.
~
Her eyes snapped open and she sat up quickly. She was breathing hard, and her skin felt hot underneath her fur.

"Fernpaw?"

She turned to see Twigpaw gazing at her with a worried look from the nest next to her.

"Are you alright?" He asked gently.

"I...yes..." She responded shakily.

He gazed at her shyly.

"Your shaking..."

To her surprise, he slowly got out of his nest and laid down next to her hesitantly. She didn't say anything, she just laid her head on her paws and scooted closer to him, grateful for the reassurance that she wasn't alone.
~
Fernpaw opened her eyes and yawned as sunlight began to pool into the den. She looked around to see that the den was empty. She sighed, happy that the rest of her night was dream free.

Thanks to Twigpaw...

For some reason her heart skipped a beat when she thought of his name. Suddenly she sat up quickly as she remembered her dream.

Breezepaw.

She knew something wasn't right when she had kept dreaming the same dream every night, even after the battle between her clan and Shadowclan.

It was a mistake wasn't it? Shadowclan was never going to attack Windclan.

Bile rose in her throat when she realized what that meant.

Checkeredpaw died for nothing...that battle never needed to happen.

Part of her made that think it was her fault.

It was my *dream. I should have known what it meant.*

She shook her head.

Theres nothing I can do about it now. But Breezepaw is in trouble. Windclan is. I need to get to him.

She pinned her ears in surprise as her heart skipped a beat when she thought of his name as well.

But...Crowstar wont let me go. Plus, if he figured out that Shadowclan was innocent...

She felt nauseous just thinking about it.

But I can't go alone, that's for sure. I need to just grab Breezepaw and go. He's a chosen one. And I have a feeling Starclan is warning me that his death is coming. And fast.

"Your awake!"

Her thoughts were interrupted as Twigpaw padded into the den, a mouse in his jaws.

"I told the apprentices and Sagebreeze to let you sleep." He meowed, dropping the mouse. "I brought this for you by the way."

"I...thanks, Twigpaw." She purred lowly and began to eat, even though she felt like she was going to throw up.

Sagebreeze...perhaps I can trust her to come with me. It's a long shot, but she's the only cat I might be able to trust. Except Twigpaw maybe...but I can't risk his safety. Something about that makes my stomach turn.

"Fernpaw?" Twigpaw gazed at her with that same worried look. "Did you hear what I said?"

Fernpaw glanced up at the brown tom.

"Oh uh...no sorry."

"I said do you want to talk about it? Your dream?"

"Oh..."

I could tell him right now. And ask him to come with me. I know he would. I can see it in the way he's looking at me. But I can't drag him into this...

"It was just a nightmare." Fernpaw meowed quietly.

"It wasn't...a message from Starclan?"

Fernpaw sighed. "I guess everyone knows about that, huh?"

"Word spreads fast."

"Well no. It was just a dream."

Twigpaw gazed at her steadily.

He knows I'm lying.

"Okay." The tom meowed. "Well eat up. Sagebreeze is expecting you for battle training." He stood there for a second before licking her ear gently.

"Just know I'm always here..." He purred before padding out of the den.

Fernpaw stared after him before taking a bite of her mouse. She wanted to puke it out as soon as it touched her tongue as she remembered Breezepaw's face. All bloody and torn up... She gagged a little and pushed the mouse away.

I can't...

She sighed and padded out of the den quickly, looking around for Sagebreeze. She spotted her mentor by the entrance of the camp and sprinted over to her.

"Morning, sleepyhead." Sagebreeze purred as she approached.

"Sagebreeze can we talk...?" Fernpaw asked quickly.

Sagebreeze raised an eyebrow before gesturing for her to follow. They padded out of the camp and began to walk in the direction of the training hallow.

"Whats going on?" Her mentor finally asked.

It was silent again as Fernpaw flicked her tail back and forth nervously.

I don't know if I can trust her not to go to Crowstar...but she's my only option right now.

Fernpaw sighed before turning to her mentor.

"I've been having dreams. The same dream every night. The one where the shadow cats attack Windclan. Even after the attack on Shadowclan. I thought it didn't mean anything... until last night when the dream was different. Breezepaw, the chosen one from Windclan, was terribly wounded and begging for me to help him."

There was a long silence as the two cats padded through the quiet forest.

"I...I think Windclan was attacked. Not by Shadowclan. Something worse." Fernpaw whispered. "And Breezepaw...he's going to die. They're going to kill him."

Another pause.

"Why tell me this?" Sagebreeze finally meowed. "Why not go to Pearlfeather or Crowstar?"

"You know why."

Fernpaw sighed.

"I'm asking you to come with me. To Windclan. To rescue Breezepaw. He's a chosen one. We need him. And I don't think even us as a full clan can beat this threat. Not alone at least."

Sagebreeze stopped and turned to Fernpaw.

"Okay." She meowed lowly.

Fernpaw gazed at her in surprise.

"Okay? That's it? Your in just like that?"

"I trust you. And I trust Starclan. But right now...I'm not sure I trust Crowstar. He's in a very troubling state. So if I need to help you with this, it's the least I can do. For the clans."

Fernpaw nodded.

"Okay...we leave tonight. We must not tell anyone. We will explain everything as soon as we have Breezepaw safely in camp."

"Do you have a plan?" Sagebreeze asked."Of how we're going to break Breezepaw out?"

"I've dreamed about Windclan camp every night. I know it like the back of my paw by now. I know which den he's in. All we need to do is sneak behind the camp, to the back of the den, break through the den walls, grab him and go."

"You make it sound like it's going to be easy." Sagebreeze sighed.

"I know it's not. But that's the only plan I got."

"And if it fails?"

Fernpaw thought for a second before slightly purring.

"We run."
~
They reached the camp after a quick training lesson to see a crowd around the Wetrock.

"Mistpaw must be receiving her warrior name." Sagebreeze meowed as they padded over to the crowd.

Without Checkeredpaw...

Crowstar was blankly reciting the words of the warrior ceremony before finally saying:
"From this day forward, your name shall be known as Mistfeather."

The clan cats began to chant her name loudly.

"Mistfeather! Mistfeather!"

Crowstar gazed blankly down from his place on the Wetrock and he suddenly yowled for silence.

"Thats not all..." He gazed at his clan before gazing at his paws. "I've thought long and hard about this and...I simply cannot lead this clan anymore."

Fernpaw gasped in surprise as the clan began to murmur horridly.

"After the attack with Shadowclan..." Crowstar paused. "I have realized I'm no longer in the current state to lead. And with a large threat on the way, I cannot lead this clan without dooming it." He then gestured Gingerpelt from his place on the deputy rock. "Gingerpelt will take my place. He will travel to the moonstone tonight and receive his nine lives. As soon as he does, mine will be revoked and I will be return to my old name, Crowshadow. I will join the warriors until I become an elder. Please respect this decision. It is for the best." He then padded down from the rock and towards the warrior den without another word.

"This can't happen, right?" Fernpaw meowed to Sagebreeze.

"It can..." her mentor responded. "I guess we will have to wait until Gingerpelt leaves to travel to the moonstone tonight..."

Fernpaw nodded and watched as the clan gazed at each other in confusion. Sandfur then padded quickly towards the warrior den, followed by Mistfeather.

He was driven by grief...

Fernpaw sighed and gazed at the sky.

Please don't let this destroy us...

~

Fernpaw laid in her nest with wide eyes. She couldn't fall asleep. Even if she tried. The plan was simple. But she knew it could go wrong very easily.

She gazed around the dark den, before her eyes landed on Twigpaw from the nest next to hers. He lay sound asleep, snoring lightly.

I chose not to bring Twigpaw...but I'm still risking Sagebreeze.

She sighed.

I would be risking anyone...

Suddenly, a soft thump sounded from outside of the den.

Thats my cue.

She got up quietly, padding out of the den where Sagebreeze stood, waiting.

"Gingerpelt left with Pearlfeather awhile ago. We should be good" Her mentor whispered.

Fernpaw nodded before following her out of the camp. The two cats walked quickly and quietly through the marshy forest in the direction to Windclan. A few minutes passed until Fernpaw spoke.

"Thank you for trusting me." She meowed quietly.

Sagebreeze glanced at her.

"You could have immediately told me I was crazy and told Crowstar. But you didn't. And that might have just saved Breezepaw's life."

Gosh. Even thinking Crowstars name makes me feel sick...

Sagebreeze nodded and purred.

"Like I said. I trust you Fernpaw. Your known for your deep connection with Starclan. It's an honor really."

"Yeah... its not as awesome as it might seem..." Fernpaw whispered. "I've seen things...not every cat dreams to see. And...it was my fault we falsely attacked Shadowclan. I should have known-

"Fernpaw." Sagebreeze gazed at her intently. "It wasn't your fault. Honestly it was no ones. It was a mistake-

"That costed Checkeredpaws life." Fernpaw hissed.

"Fernpaw. There's nothing you can do now. But you can still save us."

Sagebreeze sighed.

"You were chosen for a reason. Of all cats in this clan, Starclan chose *you*. So show us why."

Fernpaw considered her mentors words for the rest of the way as the two cats padded quietly into Windclan territory. They padded hesitantly, waiting to see dark cats patrolling. But to their surprise, there was no cats in sight. Suddenly, Fernpaw spotted the dip into the Windclan camp, and she nudged Sagebreeze gently.

"There it is."

They crouched down low, and Fernpaw resisted the urge to turn around and flee.

"Follow me." Fernpaw whispered, and began to stalk closer to the camp. As they got closer, she could see two, large cats guarding the entrance into the camp. It seemed like they weren't trying to keep cats out, but rather keep cats in.

Fernpaw led her mentor around the camp, using the tall grass and darkness for coverage.

She then spotted the familiar backside of the den she dreamed Breezepaw to be in. She remembered it because the weaved branches and leaves were spotted with white flowers. She reached the backside of the den and unsheathed her claws.

"Cut the branches and leaves." Fernpaw whispered to Sagebreeze.

The two cats then began to gently cut through the thin branches, creating a small entrance.

"I could fit through." Fernpaw whispered. "Stay out here and keep watch. I'll push him through and we will be on our merry way." She tried to keep her voice steady.

It can't be this easy.

"Be carful." Sagebreeze whispered.

Fernpaw nodded before squeezing her way through the small hole. She landed more loudly than she wanted to as she came through into the den. She gazed at the entrance as she spotted a cat sitting away from her.

Another guard...

She gagged again as the familiar smell of death and rot filled her nose. She forced herself not to look at the pile of bodies she saw from the corner of her eye in the corner of the den. She then held back a gasp as she spotted a hump of white and gray fur on the other side of the den.

She rushed over to it and pressed her ear to Breezepaw's chest as she noticed his eyes squeezed shut.

I feel a heartbeat. But it's slow.

She looked up to make sure the guard was still faced away from her, before she nudged Breezepaw gently.

The toms eyes slowly opened, but one of them remained closed. The long scratch across his face reached that eye, causing it to be swollen shut. Blood stained his white fur, and his ears looked half their size.

"F-Fernpaw?" He rasped.

"Shhh...its okay. We're going to get you out of here. Can you stand?"

"How did you..." He whispered, gazing at her in confusion.

"Theres no time to explain." Fernpaw meowed quickly. "Can you stand?"

Breezepaw tried to stand, but the deep cuts on his legs and side caused him to stumble back to the ground.

Fernpaw glanced up at the guard again, praying to Starclan that he stayed facing away from them.

"Its fine...just stay quiet." She then gently grabbed him by the scruff, and began to drag him towards the hole.

Breezepaw winced in pain and held back a yowl.

"Can you reach the hole?" Fernpaw whispered.

Breezepaw forced himself to stand, reached up with his front paws until he gripped the side of the hole. Fernpaw used her head to shove his back legs up the small space until the tom scrambled through it. She then leaped up into the hole and screeched in surprise as the guard suddenly yowled.

"He's escaping! The prisoner is escaping!"

Sagebreeze had Breezepaw on her back and she gazed at her in surprise.

"Run!" Fernpaw screeched.

The two cats began to run towards the direction of Riverclan territory. Fernpaw looked behind her to see the guard scramble through the hole and began to race after them. The weight of Breezepaw seemed to weigh Sagebreeze down and Fernpaw screeched in fear as the guard seemed to be gaining.

More cats began to stream from the entrance of the camp, yowling loudly.

"Faster!" Fernpaw yowled.

We're not going to make it.

Suddenly an idea hit her.

"Run into the river!" Fernpaw screeched.

"What?!" Sagebreeze huffed.

"Just trust me! The river that separates Riverclan and Windclan, jump into it!"

"Are you crazy?! That current will take Breezepaw under!"

"Not if he's with me."

"Fernpaw-

"Just trust me!"

She then spotted the river up ahead and she yowled quickly.

"Lay Breezepaw at the edge and jump! I will take him. Just swim! Swim as fast as you can with the current! It will be faster then running! The current will take us to the stream around our camp!"

The river was only a few feet away now. She looked behind her to see a group of large cats yowling only a few cat lengths away.

She then screeched to a halt as Sagebreeze laid Breezepaw's limp form at the edge, then jumped into the river with a yowl. She was then gone in a heartbeat as the current pushed her away.

Fernpaw grabbed Breezepaw by the scruff and dragged him into the river with her.

"Hang onto me!" She yowled around the fur in her mouth.

She then felt his front paws rap around her middle and she began to trend the water as fast as she could in order to keep them above the surface. She watched as the current dragged them away and the cats reached the edge, watching in fury as they disappeared around the bend.

Fernpaw kept their heads above the water easily until she spotted

Sagebreeze at the edge of the river near the camp.

"Fernpaw!" She yowled gratefully.

Fernpaw swam towards the edge quickly before the current could pull them away. She then lifted Breezepaw and Sagebreeze helped her pull him onto the dry ground. She then pulled herself out and rushed to Breezepaw's limp form.

"Breezepaw." She whispered and nudged him gently.

"Yeah, I'm awake." He huffed tiredly.

"Thank Starclan." Sagebreeze mumbled.

"He needs Pearlfeather." Fernpaw meowed quickly.

"Hopefully they are back." Sagebreeze huffed. "Come on, I'll help you carry him."

The two cats struggled back into camp, Breezepaw between them. Gingerpelt and Pearlfeather were standing outside of the leaders den, murmuring to each other.

"Pearlfeather!" Fernpaw yowled.

The medicine cat turned in surprise and rushed towards them.

"Fernpaw?! What happened?! Is this..."

"Breezepaw." Sagebreeze huffed. "Its a long story."

"And you will tell me everything." Gingerpelt meowed.

Pearlfeather took Sagebreezes place and helped Fernpaw carry him into the medicine den while Sagebreeze explained what happened to Gingerpelt.

They reached the den and gently laid the tom into one of the nests. Mudpaw was sorting through some herbs on the shelf when he turned in surprise.

"Fernpaw? Who's-

"Your still awake?" Pearlfeather asked.

"Well after the whole Crowstar thing...and just knowing you were taking Gingerpelt to replace him-

"It Gingerstar now..." Pearlfeather whispered.

"It doesn't matter!" Fernpaw hissed as she gazed at Breezepaw's now unconscious form.

"Right." Pearlfeather meowed. "Mudpaw get some poppy seeds for when he wakes, I will began to crush this marigold.

Fernpaw, could you gather some cobweb?"

Fernpaw nodded and gazed at the shelves.

"Here." Mudpaw rolled a ball of cobweb towards her.

She grabbed it quickly, placing it by Pearlfeather as the medicine cat crushed the marigold.

Fernpaw then crouched beside Breezepaw and gasped as his eye slowly opened.

"Fernpaw...?"

"Your safe." She whispered. "In Riverclan."

His eyes widened.

"Windclan...its...not safe...Shade is going to..."

"Shhh...don't talk." Fernpaw whispered. "Save your strength."

"No." Breezepaw whimpered. "You don't understand. Shade. The leader. He's going to attack Thunderclan next."

Fernpaws eyes widened.

"I heard the guard talking about it." He huffed. "And Fernpaw...they're all going to die...we're doomed. The clans...*will* fall."

Chapter Eighteen

[image]

It's been almost a quarter moon since Pebblepaw's death. Silverlilly and Snowypaw took the news just as hardly as Brackenpaw did. And yet they were already back to doing their regular duties. Brackenpaw was sitting outside the apprentice den, staring straight ahead.

It already feels like everyone is starting to forget about what happened.

He unsheathed his claws, digging them into the soft ground.

I should have found that flea bag. Why couldn't I find it?

After Pebblepaw's death ceremony happened when they had returned to camp with her body, Brackenpaw had immediately begun to search the forest. He looked everywhere for the fox that had killed his sister. But he couldn't even pick up its scent.

Amberstar suggests Autumnleaf scared it off as soon as it landed the blow on Pebblepaw, but Brackenpaw wasn't so sure.

He sighed and nearly jumped out of his fur when Silverlilly appeared next to him. She didn't say anything, just sat there for a moment, almost like she was considering what to say.

A few sunrises after Pebblepaw's death, Brackenpaw finally came clean to Silverlilly and Snowypaw that he knew he wasn't their real kin. Apparently Snowypaw had no idea, but Silverlilly was full of regret. But since Pebblepaw was gone, Brackenpaw didn't even care about the lies and the secrets. Nothing mattered anymore.

Because deep down the clan knew that the clans were doomed. One of the chosen ones was dead. And the prophecy stated that only four will save the clans.

"Brackenpaw."

He looked up in surprise to see Silverlilly staring at him with concern.

There was a short silence before she spoke again.

"You've barley left the camp, Brackenpaw. Let alone this den. You need to start doing your duties again. Life isn't over-

"But Pebblepaw's is."

Silverlilly's eyes narrowed and it almost seemed like she was going to hiss at him, but she took a deep breath and sighed.

"Her loss affected the entire clan. And I-

Her voice cracked a little.

"And I miss her very much. But she wouldn't have wanted us to mourn her forever. The clans are still in danger. And we can't just give up."

Brackenpaw sighed.

"Of course we can't. Except the fact that the chosen one is dead."

Silverlilly's ears flattened and she stood up abruptly.

"No. I won't sit here and listen to you talk about her like that."

He stood up as well, glaring at her.

"Your not so innocent, Silverlilly. Or did you forget the lies you fed me my entire life?"

She looked as if she was going to say something, but was interrupted as a yowl sounded from the entrance to the camp.

All eyes landed on a dark orange tom who sprinted into the camp, his chest rising and falling quickly.

"Riverclan cat..." Brackenpaw whispered.

"Amberstar?" The cat yowled. "I need to speak with Amberstar!"

Shadowblaze rushed over to the cat from beside the fresh kill pile.

"Rustyfur? What's going on?" The deputy asked.

Amberstar rushed from her den and padded up to her deputy.

"Should we discuss this in my den?" She asked quietly as she glanced around the camp where every cat stared at Rustyfur in confusion.

"Theres no time. I need to return to my camp as soon as possible. Gingerstar's orders."

Whispers spread around the camp in shock.

"Gingerstar?" Shadowblaze asked in surprise. "Is Crowstar..."

"Crowstar decided to step down. He is now known as Crowshadow. But that doesn't matter. Your clan is in huge danger."

"Maybe we should take this into my den- Amberstar started.

"No! Windclan was attacked a few sunrises ago by a group of savage rouges. We fear it is the danger Starclan has warned us about. Fernpaw was sent a vision by them and rescued Breezepaw from being held hostage in his own camp. Windclan is no more. He says they call themselves The Tribe of Leaf Bare. Breezepaw warned us that he overheard them speaking of attacking Thunderclan next. They apparently took Windclan out in less than a few minutes. You must be prepared."

There was a huge silence. Then suddenly cats began to speak over each other, asking the cat multiple questions.

"Enough!" Amberstar yowled. "Thank you for this warning. This news is...unsettling."

Rustyfur dipped his head. "I really should be returning to my camp now. We need every warrior in case the tribe decides to attack us instead."

Amberstar nodded. "Would you like one of my warriors to escort you back?"

"That shouldn't be necessary."

"Well then, may Starclan light your path. Thunderclan is grateful for Riverclan's help."

Rustyfur nodded before sprinting out of the camp without another word.

Amberstar sighed before turning to Shadowblaze and whispering something in the deputies ear.

"Shadowblaze and I need to speak privately. If an attack is really coming, we must figure out a way to protect this camp. For now, no one leaves camp by themselves and continue your duties cautiously." Amberstar yowled before padding into her den, Shadowblaze close behind.

"The fight never ends..." Silverlilly whispered before padding away.

Brackenpaw sighed and padded into the den and curled up into a nest.

Maybe the clans really are doomed...maybe this is the beginning of the end.

~

Brackenpaw's eyes fluttered open. It was dark in the den now, he must have fallen asleep. He spotted Snowypaw a few nests away, sleeping soundly. The apprentice den was practically empty, due to the fact that most of the apprentices had received their warrior names.

And Pebblepaw's gone...

He laid his head on his paws, but he was no longer tired. He gazed at the shadows along the side of the den silently, when suddenly he heard a rustling from outside. He tried to ignore it but raised his head when it sounded again.

An attack...?

He rose to his paws quietly and creeped to the entrance of the den until his head was poking out. He looked around the silent and empty camp and spotted two warriors at the entrance.

Amberstar probably assigned night watchers.

He pricked his ears when the rustling sounded again, this time towards his right. He spotted a shadowed figure creeping up the side of the camp walls near the nursery. Dirt and sticks crumbled down the side as the cat struggled up, until it finally reached the top. Brackenpaw narrowed his eyes, trying to see who the cat was, but the darkness masked its identity. The cat then sprinted off into the territory and was gone.

Why would some cat be sneaking out of camp? They could have gone through the entrance. But that would mean they would have been stopped by the guards.

Brackenpaw creeped back to his nest, curling into a ball.

Unless someone didn't want anyone to know where they were going...
~
"Brackenpaw, wake up!"

Brackenpaw scrambled awake to see Snowypaw looking down on him.

"Good, you're awake."

Brackenpaw sighed, sitting up with a yawn. "Yes, I'm awake. Now what is it?"

"Amberstar wants you in her den. Immediately. They said it was urgent."

Brackenpaw's heart skipped a beat.

Is she upset at me for refusing to leave the camp?

Nervousness crept over him as he rose to his paws and padded out of the den.
Snowypaw sprinted to keep up with him. "What do you think it's

about? Are you in trouble?"

Brackenpaw sighed. "I have no idea."

He reached the leaders den and padded inside, Snowypaw didn't follow.

Amberstar looked up as he entered. She was sitting beside Shadowblaze and Cloverwish. Autumnleaf sat a few feet away beside Owlwhisker, gazing at her paws silently.

"Greetings, Brackenpaw." Amberstar purred. "Please sit."

Brackenpaw sat slowly, his nerves overpowering him.

"Your not in trouble." The leader meowed, noticing his demeanor. She glanced at Cloverwish and nodded.

The medicine cat took a deep breath before her eyes landed on his.

"Last night, Starclan sent me a vision."

Brackenpaw's mouth was suddenly very dry.

"At first, the things they showed me were very confusing. But after replaying it in my mind, it started to make sense. And what I saw...changes everything."

All eyes were suddenly on him, including Autumnleaf's.

"I saw each of the chosen ones in battle. Fighting against an unknown enemy. I saw Breezepaw, with many scars, but using his speed to fight against his opponents. I saw Fernpaw, leading the enemy into the river, causing them too drown. I saw Thistlepaw, using her strength and senses to fight off an entire group. And then..." The medicine cat paused and glanced at Amberstar who nodded.

"I saw you, Brackenpaw. You were leaping through the trees with speed and agility. You jumped down at your enemies, stunning them with surprise attacks."

Brackenpaw's eyes landed on Owlwhisker who cleared his throat.

"I told them how I saw you catch that bird."

Amberstar stood up, padding over to him.

"Thats when we realized we were wrong this entire time." The leader murmured. "Pebblepaw was never the chosen one. It was you."

Brackenpaw began to sway a little.

"Starclan most likely knew how much we were struggling, and decided to simply tell us our mistake." Cloverwish whispered.

"But..." Brackenpaw meowed, his voice cracking. "But I'm not even clan born...how can I be-

"We thought that too." Shadowblaze meowed. "But maybe that's exactly why you were chosen."

"But Pebblepaw-

"Is gone." Autumnleaf whispered, staring at Brackenpaw intently. "It was you all along..."

Owlwhisker stood up and placed his tail on the apprentices shoulder.

"You've been training hard, but it might be time to start working on your gift."

"You mean tree jumping?" Brackenpaw asked.

"If that is your gift then you need to perfect it." Amberstar meowed. "This gives us hope. The clans aren't doomed. But an attack is coming. And you must prepare for it."

"Owlwhisker and a few other warriors will be assigned to protect you while you train." Shadowblaze meowed.
Brackenpaw gazed up at his mentor with wide eyes.

"Don't just do it for your clan." Owlwhisker whispered. "Do it for Pebblepaw. You know she would have done anything to protect this clan. Make her proud. Remember, she's here, watching over you. Always."

He nodded slowly.

Always.

~

Brackenpaw crumbled into his nest gratefully. It had been a rough few sunrises of training, and he was exhausted.

"Your back late." Snowypaw meowed from his nest.

It was dark in the apprentice den and Brackenpaw's eyes felt heavy.

"Yeah..." He yawned.

"I'll let you sleep. Chosen one."

Brackenpaw glanced at Snowypaw with a raised eyebrow, but the white tom's eyes were already closed.

Sighing, he closed his eyes as well. He began to drift off to sleep, when suddenly he heard a rustle from outside the den.

His eyes snapped open again and he raised his head. The rustling continued, and he narrowed his eyes.

He rose to his paws and poked his head out of the den. A shadowed figure was scrambling up the den walls in the exact same place before sprinting off into the darkness.

Again? Why is some cat sneaking out at night?

He pinned his ears.

Something doesn't feel right...

~

The next day, training went by fast. Owlwhisker went over tactics of how he could surprise attack an enemy from jumping down from a tree. It went surprisingly well, but Brackenpaw's mind was only

on one thing. He planned to follow the cat who was weirdly sneaking out every night and figure out what was happening. Since he was now apparently the chosen one, he wanted to follow any instinct he had. And his instincts was telling him something wasn't right.

The day ended as quickly as it had begun, and soon he was padding into his den with sore legs and heavy eyes. Training had run late again, and the only light source was coming from the moon. Snowypaw was already asleep as Brackenpaw laid down in his nest. All he wanted to do was sleep, but he was determined to figure out who that cat was and what he or she was doing.

So he forced his eyes to stay open as he waited for the familiar rustling sound. He was almost about to drift off to sleep when suddenly a sound came from outside the den. He snapped awake and rose to his paws. He poked his head out and spotted the figure scrambling up the wall.

He waited until the cat pulled itself over the edge and was out of sight, before he sprinted after it, scrambling up the wall himself. His paws slipped on the loose dirt, but managed to pull himself up. He reached the top and spotted a flash of fur disappearing behind a tree.

He sprinted after it, trying to catch up to it. But his legs were sore from training, and he was slow and lazy. He tried to keep up but soon the figure was out of sight. Brackenpaw skimmed to a halt and sighed.

Thats weird. We were going in the direction of the two leg place.

He shook his head and began his trek back to the camp.

~

"Push yourself!"

Brackenpaw balanced himself on the thin branch and sighed.

"Now, get there faster this time!" Owlwhisker yowled from down below.

Brackenpaw yawned. He hadn't gotten much sleep when he had returned to camp, he was still rattled about who the cat was.

"Brackenpaw?"

Owlwhisker looked up at him with a raised eyebrow.

"Ready?"

Brackenpaw nodded.

"Go!"

He leaped from branch to branch, tree to tree. He spotted the flowered tree a few leaps ahead which was the makeshift finish line. He reached it in a few springs and glanced down at his mentor.

"Good job!" The tom meowed.

Brackenpaw purred and slumped onto his stomach from the branch he was on.

"I guess we will take a quick break then." Owlwhisker sighed.

Brackenpaw closed his eyes, taking a deep breath.

This time I figure out where this cat is going. I still feel uneasy about the whole thing.

He considered telling Owlwhisker about it, but he couldn't tell who the cat was. For all he knew, it could be Owlwhisker himself.

"Alrighty, break time is over! Now let's run back to the other tree."

Brackenpaw sighed, opening his eyes.

"Awesome."

~

Brackenpaw sat in his nest, unsheathing and sheathing his claws. It was quiet, and the darkness was extra dark due to the clouds that covered the moon. He waited for the rustling and when it finally came, he was immediately at the entrance.

The cat was up the wall and he followed it quickly. When he reached the top, the figure turned on him in surprise before sprinting into the trees.

Oh no you don't.

Brackenpaw raced after it, leaping over rocks and branches. He was hot on its tail and realized they were headed in the opposite direction that they were last night.

Were headed to the Riverclan border...

The cat leaped over a large bush, and he followed easily before screeching to a halt. The cat stood facing away from him, gazing into the river that separated Thunderclan and Riverclan.

Brackenpaw huffed and flicked his tail back in forth.

"Theres no where else to go. Who are you? And why are you sneaking out of the camp every night?"

The cat stood motionless.

"Answer me!" Brackenpaw hissed. "You better have a good excuse."

"Oh I don't have an excuse." The cat meowed. It was a she-cat, and Brackenpaw gasped as he recognized the voice.

"I just have a reason." The she-cat continued before turning around with a smirk.

"Autumnleaf...?" Brackenpaw whispered.

Autumnleaf purred and padded a few paw steps closer to him.

"What are you doing sneaking out every night...?" Brackenpaw murmured, but he had a feeling he already knew.

"You already know, don't you." The she-cat purred.

"Theres only one reason." Brackenpaw hissed lowly. "Your meeting with the enemy."

Autumnleaf purred loudly.

"Your smarter then you look! But you don't even know the full story."

"Then tell me." He hissed, unsheathing his claws.

"I'm not just meeting with The Tribe of Leaf Bare...I'm their leader."

Brackenpaw gasped, taking a step back.

"What-

"You know, me and you are very much alike." Autumnleaf meowed. "Were both outsiders. Your fellow clan members
don't mention it, but I'm not from Thunderclan."

"Your...you're not?"

"No. I was born in a two leg home. That's why my name is so strange. Do you know what Autumn is in the two leg world?"

Brackenpaw shook his head, taking another paw step away.

"It means Leafbare."

His eyes widened.

Leafbare will destroy the clans...

"You've figured it out." Autumnleaf purred. "Good. But I'm guessing you're still wondering why? Why would I join Thunderclan, only to want to destroy it?"

There was a long silence.

"Well I'll tell you. When I was a kitty pet, I had a friend. His name was Flames. He had always admired the clans. He watched them from his fence, and dreamed of joining them. But then the Great Battle began."

The Great Battle... Brackenpaw thought in surprise.

"We heard their loud yowls and screeches as they fought each other. Flames respect for the clans disappeared, and he thought they would be better off being one whole clan rather than four separate ones. I agreed. Because I loved him. I didn't care about the clans. But I cared about him. One night, he decided to venture into the forest. I warned him it would be dangerous because of the battle. But he didn't listen."

Autumnleaf's voice cracked and her eyes clouded.

"I waited for him to return. And he never did. Soon the battle cries from the forest stopped, and I had enough courage to look for him in the forest. I found him dead. They killed him." Her eyes were like fire as she glared at Brackenpaw.

"They killed a cat that had looked up to them. Wanted to join them."

"It must have been a misunderstanding-

"SHUT UP!"

Brackenpaw's eyes widened.

"Your here to *listen*.

She took a deep breath before continuing.

"So I vowed I would do what he always had wanted. Join the clans. But I would make them into one whole. Where no fighting would ever occur, and peace would thrive. Of course I knew I couldn't do it alone. So I left my two leg home and traveled far away from the clans. I ended up finding a large group of rouges who had been abandoned by two legs. They were skinny and hungry, and it was easy to convince them to come with me. I promised them unlimited food, as long as they helped me overthrow a group of cats that took up territory's like they were better then everyone. I told them to stay near the two leg area, out of sight and that they needed to train every day. To gain strength and skill while I gained the trust of one of the clans."

"I needed to be on the inside in order to plan everything perfectly.

So for moons, these cats trained, in hope of having a better life. They were desperate, and best of all, *angry*. Many moons passed until I received my warrior name, and the trust was bonded. The first step was to find more recruits. I had heard of the small group of rouges living in the barn. I told the rouges to recruit them, and any of them that refused would be disposed. They used that as a chance to scare Windclan. Which caused them to bring it up at the gathering. And they reviled the chosen ones."

Brackenpaws breath caught in his throat as he considered this.

"I then gave the command to attack Windclan. They beat them easily. Easier than I thought honestly. I told them to keep Breezepaw alive, barley, because I wanted to be the one to kill him." She smirked at him viscously. "I want to be the one to watch as the clans last bit of hope is destroyed by *me*."

Brackenpaw shook his head, backing away.

"It was all an act. You seeming like the kind, caring cat we thought you to be. But in reality..." His eyes widened.

Autumnleaf smirked at him silently.

"You...you killed her didn't you? YOU KILLED PEBBLEPAW!"

Brackenpaw hissed in fury.

"As soon as I heard Pebblepaw, my own apprentice, was the chosen one, I knew it would be too easy to just kill her and ruin the prophecy. Only four will save the clans."

"YOU KILLED HER!" Brackenpaw yowled.

"I did what had to be done." Autumnleaf meowed steadily.

"You acted like you mourned for her." Brackenpaw spat. "It makes sense though. Thats why I couldn't find a fox. Because there never was one!"

Autumnleaf stepped closer again.

"Do you want to know why I'm telling you all this? Because like I said...we are alike."

"I'm nothing like you."

"But you are. Your an outcast. Your not a clan cat. You owe them nothing. Why are you protecting them?"

"Because Thunderclan is my family." Brackenpaw hissed.

"You might not get it now, but you will. Nothing can stop what is going to happen. The clans will fall. So join me, Brackenpaw."

His eyes widened.

"We can rule the territories together. I am honestly helping the clans. I'm bringing peace."

"Killing cats is peace to you?"

"Of course a great vision will come with sacrifices."

Brackenpaw shook his head and unsheathed his claws.

"No. I'll never join you. And I promise you, we *will* destroy you. You will fail."

Autumnleafs eyes narrowed to slits.

"I was worried you were going to say that."

She then leaped at him, tackling him to the ground. She pinned him surprisingly easily, and he struggled to break free of her grasp.

"And now..." the she-cat whispered in his ear. "You are going to *die*." She bared her teeth but he quickly kicked her off of him with his hind legs.

She went flying and landed on her side. She lay still and he padded towards her in surprise.

Did I knock her out?

Her paw then swung out, hitting his head hard. He stumbled on his paws, his vision blurring. He then fell to his side, everything spinning.

"Poor Brackenpaw..." Autumnleaf whispered sarcastically. "You didn't think I did this for nothing did you? This was just a distraction. The Tribe of Leaf Bare is in the Thunderclan camp this very moment."

Brackenpaw's heart skipped a beat.

No...

"Your clan is dead. And now, so will you."

His vision began to darken, and he felt teeth sink into his front leg as he was dragged, and suddenly he was engulfed in cold water.

He began to sink, until his world went completely dark.

Chapter Nineteen

[image]

As soon as Fernpaw woke up, she rushed straight to the medicine den. Every morning, same routine.

Pearlfeather and Mudpaw would always be up, giving Breezepaw his morning poppy seeds. The white and gray tom seemed to be looking better, his wounds were closing and slowly becoming scars.

When she padded into the den, he was sitting up in his nest, waiting for her.

"Morning." He meowed as she approached.

"How are you feeling?" Fernpaw asked, looking him up and down.

"Better." He purred in amusement.

Pearlfeather padded up to them, setting down a few poppy seeds at Breezepaw's paws.

"Actually, I don't think I need them today. The pain is bearable."

Pearlfeather raised an eyebrow but took the seeds back.

Breezepaw's eyes landed on Fernpaw's and his gaze became serious.

"Now, I need to speak with Gingerstar."

Fernpaw shook her head.

"We've been over this. He already knows that the tribe is planning an attack on Thunderclan. He sent out a warrior to warn them a few sunrises ago."

"But we should be doing more." Breezepaw hissed under his breath. "Trust me, Fernpaw. These cats are vicious. They don't have a code.

They kill in order to win."

Fernpaw gazed at him sadly.

"I know. And I understand your clan has been through a lot. But right now there's nothing else we can do. Gingerstar said it himself."

Breezepaw shook his head and stared at his paws.

Mudpaw padded up beside Fernpaw a nudged her to the side gently.

"You should go out and do something. You've been stuck in here long enough. Breezepaw will be fine."

Fernpaw sighed.

"Alright, alright."

She glanced at Breezepaw who was still staring at his paws silently.

He's been traumatized. Those cats destroyed his clan. Then tortured him.

Before she could change her mind, she nodded to Mudpaw and padded out of the den.

The air smelled fresh and marshy and the ground was slightly wet from the rain that night. She gazed around the camp until her eyes landed on Briarpaw, who was standing beside her mentor Rainfall at the entrance to the camp.

Fernpaw rushed over to her sister who turned in surprise.

"Are you guys leaving camp?" She asked.

"Yeah. We're leaving on a patrol along the river bank. Do you wanna join?"

Fernpaw nodded gratefully and padded beside her as the three cats trekked out of the camp, and through the marshy forest.

"So...how is you know who?" Briarpaw asked, nudging her gently as they walked a few paw steps behind Rainfall.

"Breezepaw? Oh, he's doing way better I think."

"You've been spending a lot of time with him you know."

"Huh?"

"Oh come on." Briarpaw purred in amusement. "You've spent two whole sunrises in the medicine den."

"Because I was worried about him!"

"A Windclan cat?"

"Y-Yes?"

The two padded silently for a moment.

"Look, just be carful." Briarpaw whispered. "As soon as this is all over, he's going back to his own camp. And you know the code."

Fernpaw glared at her sister.

"I don't know why we're even discussing this. There's nothing going on between me and...you know."

"Alright! Well then...what about Twigpaw?"

"What *about* Twigpaw?"

"I don't know. You guys seem close."

"Well..."

Fernpaw's ears turned hot and she gazed at her paws. But she was still thinking about Breezepaw. And how Briarpaw was right. She decided to change the subject quickly.

"Moving on...what do you think of Crowstar- I mean, Crowshadow, stepping down?"

Briarpaw raised an eyebrow but didn't question it.

"Well, Gingerstar seems to be doing really well as leader. If I'm

being honest, Crowshadow did the right thing. He wasn't mentally stable to lead. Plus, Sandfur was a good choice for the new deputy."

Fernpaw nodded in agreement and it was silent for a few moments.

"Great Starclan!"

Fernpaw looked up to see Rainfall rushing over to the rivers edge, and she glanced at Briarpaw in surprise.

The two apprentices sprinted to catch up to the warrior, and Fernpaw gasped as Rainfall dragged a wet form from the edge.

"Smells like Thunderclan..." Briarpaw whispered.

Fernpaws eyes widened as Rainfall turned the form over and the cats face was reviled.

"Its Brackenpaw..." She gasped.

His eyes were closed, and blood oozed from the side of his head.

"The current must have pulled him this way." Rainfall meowed, as she put her ear to his chest."He's still breathing." She then began jabbing her paws into his chest, pushing her full weight on him.

It was silent for a few minutes as Rainfall continued this motion, her eyes narrowed in concentration.

Suddenly, Brackenpaw's eyes snapped open, and he began to cough up water.

"Thank Starclan." Briarpaw mumbled.

The tom sat up slowly, looking around in confusion.

"Brackenpaw, what happened?" Fernpaw meowed sternly.

His eyes landed on hers and his ears flattened.

"Thunderclan...is dead." He whispered.

"No..." Briarpaw meowed, looking at Rainfall in fear.

"Autumnleaf..." Brackenpaw hissed, his eyes narrowing. "She's...a traitor. She's the leader. Of the tribe...she tricked us all."

Fernpaws eyes widened.

Leafbare will destroy the clans...

"Fernpaw." His eyes bore into hers. "We have to destroy her."

~

She flicked her tail back and forth anxiously as she gazed at the medicine den.

"Fernpaw."

She turned to see Briarpaw beside her, staring at her in worry.

"He's going to be fine. He was just a little shaken up, that's all."

Fernpaw shook her head, narrowing her eyes slightly.

"No you don't understand. Thunderclan has fallen. Windclan is no more, and who knows who the tribe is going to attack next."

Fernpaw leaned in closer to her sister, lowering her voice.

"I'm the chosen one. And I...I have no idea what to do."

Briarpaw blinked in surprise.

Suddenly, Sagebreeze padded up to them, her ears pinned back.

"Fernpaw. Gingerstar needs to speak with us in the medicine den."

She nodded and glanced at Briarpaw before following her mentor.

They padded into the den, where Gingerstar and Sandfur sat in front of two nests where Breezepaw and Brackenpaw were. Pearlfeather sat a few tail lengths away with Mudpaw, who glanced at her in concern.

"Fernpaw, Sagebreeze."Gingerstar meowed in greeting.

The two cats took a seat beside them and it was quiet for a few

seconds before the leader spoke again.

"As you might know, we just heard news of Thunderclan...being attacked."

Brackenpaw stared at his paws blankly, his ears pinned.

"We have no way of knowing who the tribe is going to attack next. And from the information we've been shared, we...don't stand a chance."

Fernpaw's eyes landed on Breezepaw who stared back with intently.

"Sandfur and I have been trying to come up with some battle strategies, but there is no way for sure that we can protect you three."

"You are the chosen ones. The only cats prophesied to save the clans." Sandfur murmured lightly.

"What about, Thistlepaw. She's a chosen one too." Breezepaw meowed.

"We were just about to get to that." Gingerstar huffed, glancing at Sandfur.

"We are sending you three away. You must leave the territories and find Thistlepaw. When you do, you must continue you're training until you're ready."

Fernpaw stood up suddenly.

"What?!"

"Fernpaw, please..." Sagebreeze whispered.

"I understand you must have many questions- Gingerstar began.

"No! I'm not about to leave my clan for who knows how long! Especially if we are planning on being attacked!"

"Fernpaw, there's nothing we can do." Breezepaw whispered. "I've

seen these cats fight, and they *are* vicious. I promise you wether we stay or go, we will lose."

"He's right." Brackenpaw murmured, looking up from his paws. "We aren't ready."

"Well then, when will we be ready?" Fernpaw hissed. "How will we know?"

"You just will." Gingerstar meowed. "And Sagebreeze, you will be going with them. You will help finish their training and be the one to determine when they can return or not."

"We will try and send a cat to update you on our situation a quarter moon after you leave. But if no-one comes..." Sandfur trailed off.

"Then you will know Riverclan is no more." Gingerstar finished. "And that the last clan remaining is Shadowclan."

Fernpaw sighed, sitting back down.

This is really happening...

Sagebreeze nodded.

"I won't let you down." She meowed.

The den was quiet, and Fernpaw turned to see Mudpaw staring at her with wide eyes.

"Well then, you should be leaving immediately." Gingerstar huffed, standing up.

"What, right now?!" Fernpaw asked in confusion.

"Like I said, we have no idea when the tribe is going to attack. You can't spend another night here." Gingerstar meowed, turning to Pearlfeather.

"Is Breezepaw and Brackenpaw fit for travel?"

"Brackenpaw should be fine, Breezepaw should take it easy for a

few more days but he should be able to pull through. He's strong." The medicine cat meowed.

Sagebreeze nudged Fernpaw up gently.

"I know this is a lot to take in." Her mentor whispered. "But just remember you're destiny."

Right. My destiny.

"Here, eat some poppy seeds before you head off." Mudpaw meowed gently to Breezepaw. "Should help with the pain of walking."

"Thanks." Breezepaw purred, eating the seeds quickly.

Mudpaw's eyes landed on hers and he padded over.

"So...this is goodbye?"

"More like...see you later." Fernpaw murmured.

They stared at each other before she leaned forward and rubbed her cheek against his.

"Stay safe." Mudpaw whispered. "I love you, Fernpaw."

She pulled back, holding back a whimper before dipping her head and following Sagebreeze and the others out of the den.

Cats around the camp stared in confusion as Gingerstar lead the group over to the entrance.

Briarpaw and Sparrowheart rushed up to her and her stomach dropped.

"Fernpaw what's happening?" Briarpaw meowed.

"I'm...going away for awhile. To prepare."

"Prepare? For what?" Sparrowheart asked in confusion.

"The final battle." Fernpaw whispered before rubbing her cheek against both of theirs. "I'm sure Gingerstar will explain everything

later. Just know I love you both, and I'll be back soon."

"Fernpaw!" Sagebreeze called from the entrance.

"I have to go."

"Wait." Briarpaw meowed quickly. "Be careful out there."

She nodded and turned away before she could change her mind and stay with her family.

She padded up to Breezepaw who nudged her gently.

"You okay?" He asked.

"I will be. When this is all over."

Gingerstar and Sandfur dipped their heads to the group.

"Good luck." Sandfur meowed.

"And may Starclan light your path." Gingerstar huffed. "We will see you soon."

Sagebreeze nodded before leading the group through the entrance.

It was quiet as the four cats padded through the marshy forest. Brackenpaw padded a few feet back from Sagebreeze, glaring ahead.

Breezepaw and Fernpaw padded at the rear and he kept glancing at her with concern.

"I'm fine, Breezepaw." She huffed.

"Right, I know."

It was silent again until the reached the river that separated them from Windclan territory.

"We can't go through Windclan...they will be able to follow our scent." Sagebreeze murmured. She glanced at the river.

"If we let the current take us, it will bring us straight out of the territories and the water will mask our scent."

"You want us to go in there?" Brackenpaw murmured.

"I know you might be a little hesitant, but we don't really have another choice."

"I could carry him." Fernpaw meowed. "I can swim really well, remember?"

"Oh...no I can just..." Brackenpaw huffed.

"Don't be silly just hang onto me." Fernpaw meowed annoyingly.

Breezepaw gazed at her with a raised eyebrow.

"Well then. Let's go." Sagebreeze huffed before slowly slinking into the water. The current pushed her away quickly and soon she was out of sight.

"You going to be able to do it yourself?" Fernpaw asked Breezepaw.

He huffed and silently slunk into the water.

"Alrighty then." Fernpaw rolled her eyes before grabbing Brackenpaw by his scruff to his surprise, and jumped into the water.

Brackenpaw yelped a little and began kicking the water with his back legs hitting her own, making it hard to keep them both above water.

"Stop. Kicking." She growled around the bundle of fur in her mouth.

He listened and his body went still, letting her tread the water easily. They were like this for a few minutes until she spotted a small shore to the left of the river, where Sagebreeze and Breezepaw stood, shaking their fur.

Fernpaw kicked until they reached land, where Brackenpaw scrambled up desperately. She followed, resisting the urge to roll her eyes.

"We should be out of the territories now." Sagebreeze huffed.

"Now what?" Breezepaw asked as he licked his fur.

"We find shelter. Somewhere where we can be hidden."

"I think I know a place."

Fernpaw whipped around to see a gray she-cat sitting beside the river bank.

"No way..." Breezepaw whispered.

"Thistlepaw?" Brackenpaw asked in surprise.

Thistlepaw padded forward, her ears pinned slightly.

"I've been listening to you three. And I'm in."

"What?" Sagebreeze asked in confusion.

"Thats right. You have enhanced senses." Brackenpaw whispered.

"Wait so you're going to train with us then?" Fernpaw asked. "I would think it would take a little convincing since you ran away from your clan and all."

Thistlepaw's eyes narrowed.

"I did a very bad thing. But...if I can save my clan...maybe it will make up to what I did."

Fernpaw gazed at her paws.

"I know what you're talking about and...it was my fault that battle ever happened. I should have realized my dream wasn't about Shadowclan."

"Trust me, I don't need to be caught up. I've been listening to everything. It's crazy how far I can push my senses when my mind is completely silent. I've honestly just been waiting for you three to come find me."

Sagebreeze stepped forward.

"This has been a lovely little reunion, but it looks like its getting dark soon so..."

"Right." Thistlepaw huffed before standing up quickly. "I have the perfect place where we can stay. Its kinda where I've been hiding this whole time. So if nobody found me, they shouldn't find you ether."

She turned and began to pad away from the river, and the group followed her silently.

"Well, that was easy." Breezepaw purred.

Fernpaw glanced at him in worry.

This is going to be far from easy...

Chapter Twenty

[image]

Thistlepaw gazed at the setting sun, watching the colors paint the sky. She breathed in deeply, taking in all of the surrounding scents.

She glanced behind her at the four clan cats, who were sniffing around the place she had called home for almost a half moon now.

When she ran away after the battle between her clan and Riverclan, she wandered around the outskirts of the territories, until she stumbled upon an abandoned badger den.

The cats sniffed the entrance to the underground cave, wrinkling their noses at the remaining scent of badger.

Brackenpaw caught her gaze and began to pad over. Thistelpaw sighed and turned her eyes to the sky again, where the sun was now disappearing behind the mountains.

The tom silently sat beside her, and it was quiet for a few moments before he spoke.

"You sure that badger is really gone? The stench is almost unbearable!" Brackenpaw said jokingly.

Thistlepaw sighed again in annoyance.

"I've been sleeping there for a long time, Brackenpaw. I'm pretty sure we'll be fine."

The tom nodded and there was an awkward pause.

"Did you know?" He finally asked. "About Autumnleaf? You said you've been listening ever since you left so..."

Thistlepaw unsheathed her claws and dug them deep into the grassy ground, her eyes slits.

"Yes. I knew. I actually didn't find out until her conversation with you. I heard her story of her friend that was killed. And how she wants revenge on the clans."

She looked Brackenpaw straight in the eyes.

"I honestly thought she was going to kill you."

"She almost did." The tom growled bitterly. "But thankfully I washed up on the shore. If I didn't, I would have surely drowned."

Thistlepaw glanced behind them at the other cats. Her eyes landed on Breezepaw's scarred face. He was joking around with Fernpaw as Sagebreeze purred in amusement a few tail lengths away.

"What happened to him...?" She asked cautiously.

Brackenpaw followed her gazed and glanced at her in confusion.

"You don't know?"

"I don't think my senses were strong enough yet to reach out to him at the time."

"Well...after Windclan was taken over, The Tribe of New Leaf knew that Autumnleaf wanted to kill each of the chosen ones herself. So they had to keep him alive...but just barely."

Thistlepaw shook her head sadly.

"Thats just...horrible."

She watched the tom joke around with Fernpaw and she flicked her ear curiously.

"He uses his humor to cope, I'm guessing."

There was a silent pause before the tom spoke.

"I was actually wondering...do you think you could reach out your senses to Thunderclan? I just want to know if my clan is okay."

Thistlepaw shook her head.

"I've already seen Thunderclan after the battle. But trust me, Brackenpaw. I think it would be best if I don't tell you."

The tom stood up angrily, his tail lashing from side to side.

"It's my clan! I have a right to know!"

Thistlepaw stood up, meeting his gaze with a hiss.

"If we are to beat this threat, we all need to have a clear head. We can't afford any distractions!"

Brackenpaw rolled his eyes.

"You sound like you have it all figured out don't you? Well you've been hiding here while the tribe destroys our clans. You're a coward!"

"Enough!"

Sagebreeze padded over quickly, her ears pinned.

"I think we're all just a little tired from our day of travels. Why don't we all just get some rest. We have a long day of training tomorrow."

Brackenpaw lashed his tail before sulking towards the badger hole, pushing past Fernpaw on the way.

Sagebreeze turned to Thistlepaw.

"I just need a moment." Thistlepaw meowed quietly before the she-cat could say anything.

Sagebreeze nodded silently before padding to the hole, Fernpaw and Breezepaw close behind.

Thistlepaw sat down, gazing at the now starry view. She scanned the sky, looking at the stars of her ancestors, the only sound being the soft chirp of crickets.

"Why me...?" She whispered to the sky. "Why did you choose me? I never wanted this."

Her words were met with silence and she stood up angrily.

"How are we supposed to beat this threat?! We're only four apprentices."

She held back a whimper as she crumbled to the ground, curling into a tight ball. She squeezed her eyes shut tightly, praying that sunrise would come quickly, and chase away the darkness.
~
"Thistlepaw, wake up."

Thistlepaw's eyes snapped open and she sat up, gazing up at the figure of Fernpaw.

"Morning, sleepy head." The she-cat purred. "Me and Breezepaw went hunting at dawn." She nudged a mouse towards her. "Its not much but it's better than nothing."

Thistlepaw sighed.

"Thanks but I'm not very hungry."

"You should eat something." Sagebreeze meowed a few cat lengths away, where she was sharing a rabbit with Brackenpaw.

"We have a long day of training ahead of us. You need your strength."

Thistlepaw sighed and began to force herself to eat.

When she was finished, the four cats were sitting beside the entrance to the hole, murmuring to each other quietly. She padded over, looking anywhere but at Brackenpaw as she sat down beside Fernpaw.

"Good! We're all fed and rested." Sagebreeze purred enthusiastically. "Now, each of you have been granted with a special gift resorted to your clans. But now you need to focus on using those gifts to your advantages in battle."

"Shouldn't we be planning an attack instead?" Thistlepaw asked.

"I've been given orders by Gingerstar to focus on your training for exactly a quarter moon.Then he will send out a cat to inform us what has been happing in the clans, and to strategize a battle plan. Until then, we train."

Thistlepaw sighed, but didn't press the subject.

Sagebreeze turned her gaze to Breezepaw.

"Your gift is the ability to run faster than the wind. But can you use your speed in a fight?"

"I actually have practiced using my speed to swerve against blows from my opponent." Breezepaw purred proudly.

"Very good! But you could do more. You could use your speed to strike quick and fast blows on your attacker, without getting hit. If you're fast enough that is."

"Oh I can be fast enough."

"Good. Now Fernpaw. Your gift is the ability to see visions from Starclan of future events. But you're also an incredible swimmer. You can swim against any current and hold your breath underwater for a long amount of time. If we're near a water source, you could use that. Your strongest in the water."

"So you're saying I should...drown them?" Fernpaw whispered.

"They will kill you Fernpaw." Breezepaw murmured. "You need to kill them before they get the chance."

"Unfortunately, he's right." Sagebreeze meowed. "But other than that, we should focus on your key battle skills."

She turned her gaze to Thistlepaw.

"Your abilities might just be the strongest here. Your sense of smell, hearing, and sight are highly enhanced. It seems you've mastered that during your time in isolation. But have you worked on your enhanced strength?"

Thistlepaw gazed at her paws.

"Last time I used my strength, I killed an innocent cat."

"In this case, that's a good thing." Brackenpaw mumbled grimly.

Thistlepaw glared at the tom.

"What if I told you there was a way you could master this ability?" Sagebreeze meowed lightly. "If you focus your blows on an attacker precisely, you can maybe measure how much force you land each blow. It would take practice, but it could work."

"I can't practice on any of you. I could hurt someone." Thistlepaw whispered.

"Then you will practice on me until you're ready." Sagebreeze meowed. "I'm not a chosen one."

"But-

"Its the only way."

Thistlepaw glared at the ground.

This is a horrible idea... She thought to herself.

"Now, Brackenpaw." Sagebreeze turned to the tom.

"Your abilities are the power to leap higher than any cat in the clans. You can leap from tree to tree with ease."

"I've actually mastered the ability to jump down onto my attackers from the trees." The tom meowed proudly.

"Very good. But you could also use your jumping skills to confuse your opponents by jumping over and around them. Then you can deliver the final blow while they're busy thinking about where your paws will hit the ground next."

Sagebreeze's gaze then landed on the four of them.

"You each will practice these skills on me until you've mastered

them. Then you will practice battling each other. It will take hard work, but I believe we are on our way to a smooth victory."

Thistlepaw glanced at each cat, who seemed to be filled with hope. But she couldn't help but have a pit of doubt in her stomach.

Great Starclan, help us...

Chapter Twenty One

[image]

The medicine den was quiet, the only sound being the raspy breaths of Smokeface, as Arcticwind removed the cobweb from his wound.

Fadepaw crouched down close to the gray tom, examining the deep bite mark on his shoulder.

"Its definitely getting better." Fadepaw meowed gratefully.

"Thank Starclan." Smokeface murmured. "No offense, but being cooped up in this den for almost a quarter moon is starting to get on my nerves."

Fadepaw purred in amusement as Arcticwind shakily stood up from her crouch, sniffing for more cobweb.

Smokeface's eyes then fell to his paws; his eyes glazing over sadly. This wasn't unusual for the tom. He had lost his mate *and* his son in under a moon.

Apparently a couple of sunrises ago, the guards decided to take Breezepaw to their leader to finish him off herself. From their words, she took her time with him.

Fadepaw glanced at Smokeface sadly, and her eyes shifted to the entrance to the den. Two guards sat facing away from them, keeping them trapped here since the battle.

She hadn't breathed fresh air for what seemed like forever. She glanced back at the tom, where Arcticwind was now placing the new cobweb on his wound. The white she-cat suddenly began to cough violently, her entire body shaking with every hack.

"Arcticwind!" Fadepaw rushed to the cats side, pressing her body against hers to steady her.

"I'm fine!" The she-cat hissed, shoving her away. "It was just a little cough."

She then began to cough again, stumbling on her paws. Before Fadepaw could do anything, Arcticwind stalked away to the other side of the den.

"She's so stubborn." Fadepaw hissed under her breath. "Why won't she let me help her? She's been coughing like that ever since the battle."

"It's Arcticwind you're talking about." Smokeface huffed. "It's just the way she is. Don't worry, I'm sure she will be fine. She's stronger than you think."

The tom then laid his head on his paws, closing his eyes.

Fadepaw gritted her teeth in frustration.

How am I supposed to live like this?

She watched as Arcticwind began to sort through the few remaining herbs left on the shelves.

Maybe they might let me go out and look for some herbs? We're practically out. And many cats are still injured from the battle.

Her fur stood up as an idea hit her.

And if there's a chance...maybe I can escape and find help from one of the other clans.

Taking a deep breath, Fadepaw padded towards the entrance, only to be immediately stopped by one of the guards.

"Where do you think you're going?" The tom huffed. He had rusty, gray fur with jaggy teeth and long claws.

"Don't worry, I'm not trying to escape." Fadepaw meowed jokingly.

The two toms glared down at her, noticeably unamused.

"Were almost out of herbs." Fadepaw sighed, dropping the idea of small talk.

The toms glanced at each other with raised eyebrows.

"So?" The other guard growled.

"So, I need to go out and gather more."

The gray, tom leaned in close to Fadepaw's face.

"Theres no way in hell were letting you out of this camp. If you ever thought we would, you dumber than I thought you were."

The other guard purred in amusement.

Fadepaw held back a hiss and pushed her anger down.

"We *need* herbs. Many cats are still healing from the battle. Including some of your own. If we completely run out of herbs, we will have nothing to treat your wounded with. And they could die from blood loss, or even infection. Not only that, but when Leafbare comes around, were going to need medicine that treats the sick. And most of those kinds of herbs only grow during this time of Newleaf. So if I were you, I would go speak with your so called leader of yours, and figure out a way for me to gather some herbs."

The two toms stared at her with wide, surprised eyes.

"Maybe we *should* talk to Shade..." The rusty gray whispered.

The other tom nodded vigorously.

"Stay here and watch the she-cat." The jagged toothed cat quickly padded off.

Fadepaw quietly let out the air she was holding in.

That actually worked...

They sat in silence for a few minutes until the guard returned.

"Shade said that you could gather your little herbs." The tom hissed

too Fadepaw. "But two cats have been assigned to go with you. Their waiting at the entrance to the camp."

Her eyes landed on two muscular looking cats, glaring ahead.

"Well go!" The guard hissed.

She quickly padded across the camp, glancing around in surprise. She hadn't seen the camp since the battle, and what she saw shocked her to her core.

Their dens were tattered and falling apart, and most of her clan mates sat inside them, huddled together, looking sad and angry.

Others were being pushed around the camp by Tribe cats, being forced to pick up bones that were left from meals.
Leftover meat and dried blood were littered and stained in piles, and the stench was overpowering. She was surprised she hadn't smelt it from inside the medicine den.

She glanced up at the Tallrock, her gaze only to be met by the hard stare of Shade, who sat with his tail rapped around his paws, his claws scraping the stone.

She finally reached the entrance, where the two cats turned and padded out without a word.

Okay then...

She followed quietly, padding a little faster in order to keep up with them. She glanced around in surprise as they walked across the moor.

At least some things haven't changed.

The long grass seemed to stretch for miles, and the stench faded away to the sweet smell of nature.

"Just find what you need so we can go." The large she-cat growled from beside her. "And don't get any ideas."

"Chill out, Dana." The tom meowed jokingly. "You should be happy

to leave your usual post. You hate having to watch those mangy felines."

Fadepaw held back a remark and began to pad in the direction of the barn.

"Shut your mouth, Suresh." Dana hissed, her fangs bared. Her eyes turned too Fadepaw. "And you, what exactly do you need?"

They seem to argue quickly...maybe I might be able to sneak off and make a run for it at the right time...

"Hey! Did you hear me?" Dana growled.

"Yes, yes, sorry. I really just need catmint."

The two cats glanced at each other confusedly but didn't press anything.

The two mouse brains don't even know what catmint is. Little do they know that it doesn't even grow anywhere near here.

She smiled a little as she spotted the barn ahead.

"You see that, Dana?" Suresh purred, nodding towards the wooden building. "Thats where Autumn sent the patrol to slaughter those dumb barn cats. I wonder if there's any left over blood staining the walls?"

Autumn...?

Fadepaw shuddered slightly.

"Shut your mouth!" Dana hissed again, turning on the tom. "Were not supposed to mention her name."

"Well how was I supposed to know that? Shade doesn't ever tell me anything."

"It was informed to the entire Tribe!"

The two cats continued to bicker, and Fadepaw took a deep breath.

I guess its now or never...

She slowly began to creep away from the cats, slinking into the grass. She placed her paws lightly, trying not to make a sound. She was almost two cat lengths away, when Dana glanced away from Suresh, her eyes widening as she realized her prisoner was gone.

"Where is she?!" She yowled.

Suresh's eyes suddenly landed on Fadepaw's and she stood up.

"There!" The tom screeched.

Fadepaw turned on her heels and sprinted towards the barn.

Great Starclan, I didn't plan this out well!

She could hear loud paw steps from behind her and gaining, and she pushed herself to go faster.

Maybe if I reach the barn I can find some cover and I can-

Her thoughts were cut off as she was suddenly tackled to the ground by something hard as rock. She scrambled around, trying to get free, only to be pinned by Dana.

"You stupid clan cat!" The she-cat hissed with fury in her eyes.

Suresh emerged from a nearby bush, panting loudly.

Dana unsheathed her claws and growled deeply, inching her head closer to hers until her muzzle was breathing into her ear.

"You need to be taught a lesson." Dana hissed.

~

Arcticwind's ears perked suddenly as she heard the paw steps of Fadepaw entering the medicine den.

"Where have you been?!" The old she-cat hissed.

Fadepaw glared at the ground, blinking away the blood drizzling into her eyes. Smokeface raised his head in surprise from his nest.

"Your face, Fadepaw!" The tom meowed.

Arcticwind padded closer, sniffing her face.

"You'll need some marigold and cobweb for that." She meowed sternly before padding towards the shelf.

Fadepaw sulked over to her nest near Smokeface, sitting down with a huff.

"What happened?" The tom whispered.

"It doesn't matter." Fadepaw growled. "It didn't work anyways. We're still stuck here."

She glanced up in surprise as Arcticwind began a fit of coughs, dropping the marigold she was carrying. Fadepaw rushed to the she-cats side and guided her to her nest.

"I don't care what you say, you need rest. Your obviously not well."

To her surprise, Arcticwind didn't argue. Instead, she crumpled into her nest, coughing loudly.

"Maybe you have greencough?" Fadepaw meowed, searching around the shelves, ignoring the constant sting radiating from her wound.

"Perhaps you need tansy?"

"Fadepaw." Arcticwind rasped sternly. "Don't waist what remaining herbs we have on me. Treat your wound. I can tell from your voice that you're in pain."

Fadepaw turned on the medicine cat angrily.

"We wouldn't be *waisting* anything! And I'm fine!"

"Maybe you should just let her help you..." Smokeface mumbled to Arcticwind.

"Stay out of this." She hissed back. "Fadepaw listen to me. I don't

have greencough. I'm just...old."

Fadepaw blinked in confusion.

"Come here..." Arcticwind rasped.

Fadepaw padded to her mentor slowly, fear creeping over her as she gazed at the weak cat.

"I have been alive a long time..." The she-cat continued. "And I feel myself slipping away."

"Slipping away...?" Fadepaw whispered in fear.

"You were right. I *have* been sick since the battle. I just didn't want to worry you. Or use up any of our herbs."

"Arcticwind..."

"Let me speak. My time here is coming to an end. And I believe you're no longer an apprentice. You've grown into a strong, wise, and noble cat, Fadepaw. I know it's not very traditional, but I think its time you received your full name as a medicine cat."

Fadepaw's eyes widened in surprise, and before she could say anything, her mentor continued.

"If things were...different, I would have taken you to the moonstone, where you would have presented yourself to our ancestors and confirmed your wish to become a medicine cat. But in my eyes, you have made that clear. You will serve this clan well."

"But, Arcticwind, Windclan isn't even a clan anymore...this will mean nothing." Fadepaw whispered sadly.

"It means everything." Arcticwind huffed. "And I promise you...a battle between good and evil is coming. And I have faith good will win. And you should too."

Fadepaw glanced at Smokeface who shared equal confusion.

The medicine cat then began to cough roughly, and she stilled

herself after a few moments.

"Fadepaw...you have proven yourself time and time again...so by the power invested in me, as the medicine cat of Windclan, I pronounce you a full fledged medicine cat. And from this day forward, your name shall be Fadewhisper."

Arcticwind then pressed her nose to hers gently.

Fadewhisper pulled away and blinked in surprise.

Did this really just happen...?

Without another word, Arcticiwind laid her head on her paws and closed her eyes.

"Congratulations, Fadewhisper." Smokeface purred from his nest.

She nodded to him and glanced at the entrance to the den, where the light was slowly fading into night. She numbly padded to the shelves and grabbed some cobweb, placing it on her face where the scratch had pierced her brow.

She then curled up into her nest beside her mentor. She watched the she-cats stomach rise and fall gently.

Arcticwind doesn't even seem that old...why is she speaking like she's going to join Starclan?

She shook her head and closed her eyes.

Theres no way. The old, grouchy ball of fur still has many moons ahead of her. She wouldn't just make me a full medicine cat without seeing how I handle the pressure. That's Arcticwind for you.

Fadewhisper continued thinking the same thing, trying to reassure herself.

Little did she know that when she woke, Arcticwind would be dead.

Chapter Twenty Two

[image]

Breezepaw's eyes blinked open and a yawn escaped his lips as he sat up in his makeshift nest.

The abandoned badger den was still dark, and three cats were fast asleep. He glanced at the nest next to his to see it empty.

Fernpaw...

He sat up, stretching quickly, before padding quietly out of the den. The night air was cool, and the sun was slowly emerging from behind the mountains.

Breezepaw spotted Fernpaw sitting a few cat lengths away, facing away from him. He padded up to her, nudging her gently before pressing his warm body against hers. She didn't respond, instead watched silently ahead, as if she was waiting for something.

"Is everything okay?" Breezepaw purred quietly, licking her ear.

She sighed and faced him with a worried look.

"Breezepaw...it's been over a quarter moon since we got here."

He nodded proudly.

"Yeah and we've been training our tails off. We've practically mastered the moves Sagebreeze taught us. And let me just say, your battle skills have improved tremendously!"

She nudged away from him, flicking her tail in annoyance.

"This isn't a joke, Breezepaw!"

"I wasn't joking..."

She sighed again and nodded.

"I know, I know...I'm sorry. I'm just on edge..."

Breezepaw cautiously sat closer to her again, resting is tail on her shoulder.

"Are you worried about the battle? Because if you are, trust me we all are."

"It's not that...well it is but..."

She suddenly turned to him, her eyes full of worry.

"It's been over a quarter moon. Gingerstar was supposed to send a messenger by now."

I completely forgot about that...

"And he said if the messenger didn't reach us..."

"Then that means the tribe took over Riverclan..." Breezepaw finished.

"Yes..." Fernpaw shook her head angrily. "Not only that, but I haven't had a vision from Starclan for awhile now. Why won't they just tell us what to do?!"

Breezepaw nudged her lightly.

"Then that wouldn't make Starclan...well...Starclan."

She rolled her eyes when suddenly realization dawned on her.

"Breezepaw...whats going to happen after the battle?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well...after we win...witch hopefully we will-

"We will."

"Whats going to happen to us? We live in completely separate

clans."

Breezepaw's eyes widened.

I forgot about that too...

"Its against the warrior code to have a relationship with any cat from another clan." Fernpaw's eyes began to water.
"I can't believe I'm saying this but...I think I love you, Breezepaw."

Breezepaw suddenly broke out in a loud purr.

"I love you too..."

Fernpaw rushed forward and rested her head on his shoulder, closing her eyes.

"Whatever happens," Breezepaw purred. "we will make it work. I don't know how, but we will. Let's just get through this battle first."

Fernpaw pulled away, nodding. She looked up into his eyes and he couldn't help but get lost in the beauty of her.

"Good, you two are awake."

Fernpaw scooted away quickly, turning towards Sagebreeze who was padding towards them with a serious look on her face. The rest of the cats padded out behind her with tired eyes.

"From the look on your face, I'm sure you know too..." Fernpaw mumbled to Sagebreeze.

She nodded and turned to the others as everyone huddled together.

"Its been over a quarter moon." Sagebreeze huffed. "Witch means only one thing-

"The tribe has taken over Riverclan." Brackenpaw hissed under his breath.

"Yes." Sagebreeze growled with equal anger.

"We don't know that for sure though." Breezepaw mumbled.

"Actually..." Thistlepaw looked at her paws sadly. "Last night I heard yowls from the territories. I looked deeper and...Riverclan was under attack. From what I'm gathering now...they didn't win."

Fernpaw shook her head with a slight whimper. Breezepaw pressed himself against her reassuringly.

"It'll be okay..." He whispered in her ear.

"I'm going to Riverclan." Sagebreeze hissed.

"What?!" Thistlepaw meowed in surprise.

"I have to see for myself."

"What did I just tell you?" Thistlepaw hissed. "I'm sorry, but there is no Riverclan anymore."

"Well then I'm going to go help." Sagebreeze began to pad away from the group.

"Sagebreeze there's nothing you can do." Fernpaw whimpered.

"Fine, then I'm going to deliver a message."

The four apprentices looked at each other in confusion.

"What message?" Brackenpaw meowed.

"The battle is beginning. Tonight." Sagebreeze hissed, glaring ahead.

"What?!" Breezepaw stood up suddenly. "But are we even ready?!"

Sagebreeze turned to look at them each in turn.

"You all have improved more than I ever thought you would in only a quarter moon. Now that Riverclan is...no more...that means the only clan left is Shadowclan."

Thistlepaw looked at her paws. "She's right, I've been watching and listening in on them too. The tribe hasn't touched them...yet."

"Well we don't have enough time to keep waiting." Sagebreeze

continued. "We have to attack before all of the clans are gone."

"We can't do this irrationally." Fernpaw meowed, her voice sounding a little stronger. "We need a real plan if we're going to win this fight."

"She's right." Breezepaw meowed.

Sagebreeze nodded before gesturing for them to gather around her. "We know most of the clans are under the tribes control-

"Wrong." Thistlepaw interrupted. "The clans might be over taken by the tribe, but none of the cats from the clans are on the tribes side. They want to fight back, they just don't have any hope that they could win."

"Then we need to give them hope..." Breezepaw whispered.

"Thats it, Breezepaw!" Fernpaw meowed in surprise. "The tribe has only been able to defeat the clans one by one. But if each clan works together, it might give them the hope they need to fight."

"How are we supposed to get them to believe that each clan is willing to help." Brackenpaw growled. "No offense but the clans aren't exactly best friends."

"No...they might not believe a cat from another clan...but the would believe a fellow clan mate." Sagebreeze meowed in realization. "This is why Starclan chose a cat from each clan as a chosen one."

Suddenly, the she-cat unsheathed her claws, drawing four circles in the dirt. "Pretend each of these circles is a clans camp."

She then drew a tiny circle in the middle of the bigger ones. "And this is four trees. The only neutral place in all the territories. If each of you travel to your clans and convince your clan mates to rebel against the tribe, you can lead them to four trees where all four clans will meet."

"Once they see the other clans, that should be enough to encourage them to fight." Thistlepaw meowed.

Sagebreeze nodded. "But it won't be easy. You each will need to sneak into the camps and help your clan mates escape. As soon as you're out, the fellow guards will surely follow you. The ultimate goal though is to make it to four trees. We will only have a real chance if every clan makes it there."

The four apprentices nodded.

"Is this really happening tonight...?" Fernpaw mumbled after a few moments of silence.

"It has too." Brackenpaw growled. "If Shadowclan gets attacked, it would be too late. Autumnleaf will have full control over all of the clans. And we can't let her win." He unsheathed his claws. "I'm going to make her pay for what she did to Pebblepaw."

"Save it for the battlefield." Sagebreeze meowed, resting her tail on his shoulder.

"What about you, Sagebreeze?" Fernpaw meowed. "Will you be joining me to Riverclan?"

Sagebreeze paused and looked up at the sky. "Something tells me this is something each of you must do on your own. I will travel to four trees and await your arrival."

Fernpaw nodded and another silence rested on the group. The sun was now fully up, the sun beating down on the cats.

"Well, what should we do until then?" Breezepaw meowed.

"We must prepare ourselves." Sagebreeze huffed. "Thistlepaw and I will go hunting. We must be fully fed for this battle. Brackenpaw, you should practice your tree leaping. Its going to be your key to sneaking into Thunderclan camp. Breezepaw and Fernpaw..." The she-cat gazed at the two cats knowingly. "You should help each other practice a few of your battle skills. But don't overdue it, you still need every ounce of energy you can get."

The four cats nodded and quietly dispersed.

"Lets just take a walk." Fernpaw meowed, leading Breezepaw

towards the grassy field.

"You sure we shouldn't train?" Breezepaw huffed surprisingly.

"Lets just enjoy the time we have left..." Fernpaw mumbled.

Breezepaw stopped. "I thought we agreed we would make it work after the battle?"

Fernpaw sighed and turned towards him.

"Breezepaw...I can't. I love my clan. And when this is over, everything will go back to the way it was. We can't...we can't see each other after this."

Breezepaw's eyes began to water. "Fernpaw I-

"All I want..." Fernpaw padded closer to him and licked his ear gently. "is to enjoy every second I have left with you..."

Breezepaw closed his eyes and nodded, giving in. His nose breathed in her sweet scent and the two tumbled over in the grass, the world disappearing as they lost themselves within each other.

~

"Breezepaw, wake up!" Fernpaw meowed in a hushed whisper.

Breezepaw's eyes fluttered open to see her bright green eyes gazing down at him.

"Morning..." He meowed sluggishly, purring lightly.

"Morning? Breezepaw its night."

His eyes widened, and he was fully awake now as he sat up quickly.

The battle...

"We have to go..." Fernpaw meowed. "The others are waiting."

Breezepaw nodded and rose to his paws. The two began to pad out of the grassy field to find the group by the badger den, talking quietly.

"There you two are!" Sagebreeze meowed in relief.

Breezepaw glanced at Thistlepaw who stared back with a raised eyebrow. He quickly looked away, stepping away from Fernpaw slightly.

"Well this is it." Brackenpaw growled gazing up at the clear night sky.

Fernpaw nodded nervously. "Its sorta scary to think that we're going into this only as apprentices."

There was a long silence as the realization dawned on them.

"Maybe you don't have too..." Sagebreeze meowed. "Go into this as apprentices I mean."

"What are you talking about?" Brackenpaw meowed confusedly.

"I know it won't be traditional, but what if I performed a short warriors ceremony for the four of you. You've obviously proven yourselves to be strong warriors of each of your clans."

"Can that even be done?" Thistlepaw whispered.

"It would be under the light of Starclan..." Fernpaw mumbled, gazing at the sky. "Something tells me this is supposed to happen..."

"Well then in that case we should do it." Breezepaw purred.

The four apprentices nodded before standing in a line beside each other, gazing at Sagebreeze nervously.

Sagebreeze nodded, slightly unsure of herself.

"Well I'm not entirely sure how these things work, but I'll try and say what I remember from Crowstar's speeches." The she-cat took a deep breath before beginning.

"These four apprentices have proven themselves time and time again. I'm sure each of them have had their ups and downs but...even under all the pressure of knowing they were the chosen

ones, they pulled through. And I truly believe they will be able to save the clans tonight. But certainly not alone. Together they will face this threat, and win. So it only seems right that they receive their warrior names together as well."

Sagebreeze's eyes landed on each of them before continuing.

"Do all four of you promise to uphold the warrior code, even at the cost of your lives?"

Breezepaw glanced at Fernpaw who gazed straight ahead.

"I do." She whispered with the other cats.

"I do..." Breezepaw mumbled and turned towards Sagebreeze again.

"Then by the power invested in me, I now give you your warrior names. Thistlepaw, Brackenpaw, Breezepaw, and Fernpaw. From this day forward you shall be known as..."

Sagebreeze paused, glancing at the starry sky before nodding to herself.

"You shall be known as Thistlestrike, Brackenheart, Breezerunner, and Fernwish."

The four newly made warriors gazed at each other proudly.

"Now you won't just win this battle, but you'll win this battle as warriors!" Sagebreeze yowled.

The four cats rose to their paws, yowling battle cries.

"Are you ready?" Sagebreeze meowed. They all nodded silently. "Alright. Breezerunner and Thistlestrike, you two will journey together since Windclan camp isn't that far from here. When you reach Windclan territory, Thistlestrike will then head to Shadowclan. Brackenheart, you and Fernwish will head in the opposite direction towards Riverclan. You will do the same."

There was another silence.

"Its time." Sagebreeze whispered. "I wish you all good luck. I will see you at four trees."

She began to pad away before Fernwish rushed forward, resting her head on the she-cats shoulder.

"Thank you for being such an amazing mentor..." She mumbled. Sagebreeze's eyes began to water before she turned away and quickly padded towards the direction of the territories.

Fernwish then turned towards Breezerunner. Without hesitation, she rushed to his side a rubbed her head against his shoulder.

"I love you..." she whispered into his ear. She then turned away and gestured to Brackenheart. Before Breezerunner knew it, the two cats were gone.

"You two really *are* idiots." Thistlestrike purred jokingly.

Breezerunner began walking, ignoring her comment. She joined him by his side and nudged him gently.

"You know what's going to have to happen after this is all over right?"

He glared at the ground.

"Yes I know. We can never see each other again."

"Well technically you'll still see each other at gatherings."

"Its not the same."

"I know..."

There was a long silence as the two cats trudged through the long grass towards Windclan territory.

"If it makes you feel any better, I'm about to see my clan who probably hates me." Thistlestrike meowed quietly.

"They don't hate you."

"You didn't see the way they looked at me after...you know."

"They didn't understand. Now that they know your the chosen one-

"Well I left them. When they needed me. When all of the clans needed me. I regret that now, it's just...too late."

"Its never too late. I mean look at us now. We're about to begin the ultimate battle!"

Thistlestrike nodded, purring slightly.

"I just wish they knew how sorry I am...and that I would do anything to protect them."

Breezerunner nodded knowingly.

Just like how I would do anything to protect Fernwish.

As the two cats padded onward, the moon appeared from behind the clouds, shining its light down on them.

For the final battle, was about to begin.

Chapter Twenty Three

[image]

Thistlestrike padded quietly through the dark, pine tree forest. She had parted with Breezerunner when they had neared the Windclan borders, where she had wished him good luck.

Thinking back on it, she prayed to Starclan that he wasn't caught before he reached the camp. From the other cats perspective, they might think she had it easy since the tribe hadn't taken over Shadowclan yet, and she could practically walk right in.

When in reality, she had it the hardest. The last time she had seen her clan was after the battle against Riverclan.

And when I murdered Checkeredpaw.

She shuddered, knowing what made it even worse was when Fernwish had told her Crowstar had stepped down from leader because of it. Shaking her head to clear it, she took a deep breath, smelling the air.

Shadowclan patrol a few miles away...three cats I think. They seem nervous...they know their next...

She sighed and unsheathed her claws.

Shadowclan won't fall. I won't let it.

But deep down she knew that if this plan was going to work, she was going to have to convince the very clan that hated her, to trust her.

Thistlestrike stopped in her tracks as a familiar scent hit her nose.

Shadowclan camp...its only a few cat lengths away now.

A part of her wanted to abandon the plan all together, and run

away again. From her clan, her problems, the world. But something inside her pushed her paws forward as she neared the camp entrance.

Two cats stood on either side of the opening. From the looks of them, it was Darkpool and Roseheart.

Taking another steady breath, Thistlestrike padded forward, head held high.

Darkpool noticed her first, whipping his head towards her with a hiss, his fur on his neck standing up. Roseheart gasped and stepped back in shock, and Darkpool's body softened a little as he realized who it was.

"Thistlepaw...?" The gray tom growled.

Thistlestrike nodded slowly.

"Yeah...it's me."

She stiffened as Roseheart suddenly lunged forward with a shriek of surprise, but instead of feeling claws sink into her pelt, she felt her soft head resting on her shoulder.

Thistlestrike gasped in surprise at the cats gesture, and she pulled away from her with a purr.

"Some of us thought you were dead!" She meowed. "But not me! I knew you would come back to save us!"

Darkpool's eyes narrowed to slits. "Roseheart, get away from her." He hissed calmly.

Roseheart willingly stepped back, her excitement fading slightly.

Darkpool flicked his tail. "Go inform Bearstar. This is definitely...unexpected."

Roseheart nodded, glancing at Thistlestrike before padding into the camp.

Darkpool suddenly stepped closer to her, his nose barley touching hers.

"How dare you show your face again." He hissed. "Your a coward. Watching from afar as your clan prepares for a battle they know they will lose."

She was expecting this reaction, but his words still sunk deep like wounds.

"We could have prevented all of this, you know." The tom continued. "If you had just stayed and trained with the other chosen ones like you were supposed too!"

"Trust me...I know what I did was unforgivable." Thistlestrike meowed, her voice cracking. "But if you just let me explain-

"Darkpool!"

Bearstar appeared from the entrance, followed closely by Fangtooth. His eyes widened when they landed on hers and he turned to Darkpool quickly.

"Enough." He hissed in the toms ear.

With one final growl, Darkpool stepped away from her.

"Thistlepaw..." Bearstar mumbled under his breath. "It really is you."

"Its actually Thistlestrike now..." She meowed cautiously.

The leaders eyebrows raised in surprise, but he didn't question it.

"So how are you going to punish her?" Darkpool hissed.

There was a long silence as the leader and deputy stared at her in quiet awe.

"No. There will be no punishment needed." Bearstar mumbled.

"What?!"

"Whats important is that she has returned. We don't have time for

anything other than preparing."

"Thats actually why I'm here." Thistlestrike meowed. "I have some very vital news."

Bearstar nodded. "Maybe it would be best if...if you informed the entire clan. I think they should all hear from you directly why you...left us."

"In shorter words, some cats understand and some cats don't." Fangtooth growled, glancing at Darkpool.

Thistlestrike nodded. "That would be best..."

I certainly have some things I need to say...

"We must make it quick." The she-cat meowed.

The leader then ushered her into the camp. As she padded through the entrance, her breath shortened in nervousness.

Almost every cat was out of their dens, watching her pad towards the shade rock. Some cats eyes narrowed to slits, while others stared at her in awe.

Her eyes landed on Rainpaw and Riverpebble, who sat near the nursery. They stared back at her with watery eyes, but didn't approach her.

The group reached the rock, and Bearstar dipped his head to her, gesturing her to climb up. Cautiously, she padded to the top of the rock, glancing around as the cats of Shadowclan gathered around at the bottom, murmuring to each other.

It felt weird to be looking down on them, like she was some sort of leader.

I am no leader...

But another force inside her told her that tonight, she needed to be. She swallowed, her throat dry, and began to speak.

"Cats of Shadowclan. I'm sure your all very confused right now..." She flicked her tail back in forth nervously, and her eyes landed on Rainpaw's in the crowd. Her sister nodded to her, and that gesture was all she needed to continue.

"I know some of you must hate me." She glanced at Darkpool who stared at his paws.

"And rightfully so. I left you out of my own cowardliness. I was scared of what I was becoming. And was afraid I might hurt the cats I care about. I thought being away from everything...and everyone... would be protecting you all. But I did the exact opposite. And I know that now. The truth is...I can't change what I did in the past. But I can try to change our future."

Her eyes raked the cats, who's gazes softened and began to fill with hope.

"Me and the other chosen ones have been training outside of the clan territories for the past quarter moon now. And we have made a plan. A plan that will free all of the clans from the tribe. But in order for it to work, all four clans must work together."

Bearstar's eyes suddenly filled with determination and quickly joined her at the top of the rock.

"As leader of Shadowclan, whatever you're planning, we're in." The tom meowed.

More murmurs broke out among the crowd at the leaders words.

"How can we trust you?" A cat meowed from the back. "After you abandoned us?"

"Yeah!" Another cat chimed in. "You appear out of no where, and suddenly say you have a plan? Maybe you're helping the tribe, and this is all a trap!"

"What..." Thistlestrike murmured in surprise.

"Of course she's not with the tribe!" Rainpaw meowed loudly, silencing the whispers.

The she-cat padded forward towards the front, her head raised high. For a moment, Thistlestrike barley recognized her sister. It seemed like forever since the last time she saw her.

"Yes, Thistlepaw left." The she-cat continued. "But only because she felt as if she was doing it to protect us. But now we understand what really happened on the day of the battle. Checkeredpaw's death was a tragic accident. Thistlepaw struck him in self defense with her powered strength. And if what she's saying is true, witch I believe it is, she has been training to control her power."

Rainpaws eyes met hers warmly.

"I trust my sister." She finished.

More whispers erupted, until Bearstar yowled for silence.

"From what she told me, we don't have much time." He turned to Thistlestrike. "Whats the plan?"

She nodded and stepped forward slightly.

"Each of the chosen ones are with their clans this very moment. Each of them are going to lead them out of the tribes grasp, towards four trees. There, all of the clans will meet, the tribe most likely close behind, and we will finally have a fair chance of beating them."

"Yes..." A voice meowed, and Raspberrywhisper stepped forward. "This was in the very prophecy from Starclan. All four clans fighting together, at four trees."

Bearstar nodded. "Then it is meant to be."

"We must leave soon though." Thistlestrike whispered to him.

Nodding again, the leader raised his voice.

"I will not force any cat to fight, for the battle will be brutal. But if you are willing to step up, for Shadowclan, for all the clans, step forward now."

At first, the crowd was completely still. Then suddenly, Rainpaw stepped forward, determination on her face. She was shortly followed by Fangtooth, then Riverpebble. Soon every cat began to step up, meowing battle cries. Darkpool included, although he still avoided Thistlestrike's gaze.

"Very well then." Bearstar meowed proudly. "Of course, Raspberrywhisper should stay here to treat any severely wounded cats."

"Someone should stay here with her for protection." Fangtooth meowed from below the rock.

"That is unnecessary." The medicine cat growled. "You will need every cat at four trees in order to win. I can take care of myself."

Bearstar thought to himself for a moment, then nodded reluctantly.

"Every cat! Prepare yourselves! We leave in a few moments."

The cats then dispersed, and Thistlestrike went immediately to Rainpaw, who met her halfway. She rested her head on her sisters shoulder and purred.

"I'm so sorry." She whispered.

"Don't be." Rainpaw meowed sternly. "I'm just glad you're back."

Riverpebble padded over quickly, immediately going to lick Thistlestrike's ears.

She purred happily, realizing just how much she had missed her family.

"Thank you for saying that Rainpaw..." Thistlestrike meowed when her mother had pulled away with a purr. "Or should I be calling you by a different name...?"

"No." Rainpaw meowed disappointedly. "I'm still an apprentice. Though Lillypaw, Oceanpaw, and Dovepaw are now Lillyriver, Oceanbreeze, and Doveclaw."

Thistlestrike nodded and a hint of cockiness spread through her. "Well you can no longer call me Thistlepaw. It's Thistlestrike now."

Confusion spread through Rainpaw's face, but before she could speak, Riverpebble interrupted.

"We don't have a lot of time before we leave, but I think you should see this." The she-cat purred ushering her towards the nursery.

"While you were...away...guess who had their kits?" Riverpebble purred.

"Peachpelt!" Thistlestrike gasped.

"Take a look...to remind you of what you're fighting for."

Thistlestrike crept through the entrance and a loud purr erupted her as she spotted the cream colored queen towards the back of the dimly lit den.

"I heard you had returned." Peachpelt murmed quietly.

For a second, Thistlestrike was worried the queen was one of the few cats still angry with her. But to her surprise the she-cat meowed softly.

"Come meet my kits."

Thistlestrike padded forward and peered over the queens belly to see two small kits curled against her fur. They looked to be only a half moon old.

"What are their names?" She whispered.

"The white one is a tom, his name is Thornkit. And the cream colored she-kit is Bumblekit."

"They are beautiful..." She met Peachpelt's eyes. "You will make an amazing mother."

The queen purred and began to groom her kits.

"Thistlestrike."

She turned to see Rainpaw's head peeking through the entrance.

"It's time to go."

Thistlestrike took a deep breath and began to pad towards the opening.

"Wait."

She turned back towards the queen.

"Good luck."

She nodded and pushed her way through the nursery's entrance.

Almost the entire clan was waiting for her by the shade rock as Bearstar padded towards her.

"I think it's only right for you to lead us into this battle." He meowed.

Thistlestrike pushed down her doubt and meowed loudly for every cat to hear her.

"Shadowclan! It's time! It's time to free the clans!"

With that, she sprinted towards the camp entrance, Bearstar and Fangtooth close behind.

Their paw steps seemed to shake the pine tree forest, as they began their journey into battle.

Chapter Twenty Four

[image]

Brackenheart padded silently through the forest, twitching his ears back and forth, waiting to hear the slightest movement.

He had separated from Fernwish when they had reached the river, where he had wished her good luck.

If even one of us fails this mission, and one of the clans doesn't reach four trees...

He shook his head, trying not to think about it.

This is too risky, padding through the forest like this.

He glanced up towards the trees and smiled to himself. He leaped through the air towards the nearest tree and scrambled his way up the bark.

Taking a deep breath, he leaped from tree to tree, digging his claws into the wood to steady himself each time he landed. He was moving with agility and speed, going much faster than he would have on foot.

A few minutes passed, when suddenly a scent hit his nose. He screeched to a halt at the next tree he landed on, almost causing him to fall. Down below, a few cat lengths away from him, three muscular cats leaped over a large rock, murmuring to each other.

Brackenheart narrowed his eyes and he pricked his ears.

"How did we end up on patrol?" One of the cats growled. "We're some of the best fighters in the tribe."

One of the other cats, a she-cat, shoved her shoulder against the cat roughly.

"Your just grouchy because we haven't eaten in what seems like days."

"Thats only because Autumn wants every cat either on patrol, or training for the battle." The last cat meowed calmly.

"She said its only amount of time before we make our final move on Shadowclan, and the clans are finally ours."

"You mean hers..." The first cat hissed under his breath.

The three cats continued on, walking out of ear shot.

Even the name Autumn brought a growl to Brackenheart's throat. His claws dug deep into the bark, imaging them sinking into her flesh.

Focus. The way they were speaking sounds like Autumnleaf, or Autumn, is going to be at Thunderclan camp. I need to restrain myself.

Sighing, he continued his way towards the camp, leaping from branch to branch.

Besides, I'll have plenty of time to fight her at four trees.

A smile formed on his lips, and the thought pushed him to go faster. A few moments passed when the familiar scent of the camp hit his nose. Though the once soothing scent was masked by the musty smell of the tribe. Along with the scent of blood. His heart skipped a beat, and his breath caught in his throat.

Focus. He said to himself again.

I need a way in...

He leaped to the nearest tree and he peered through the leaves. He could see faint outlines of the cats at the bottom of the pit of the Thunderclan camp. Or at least what was left of it. Even behind a ray of leaves, he could tell the camp was destroyed.

Most of the dens were torn down, replaced with sticks dug into the ground, forming a cage like interior where most of his clan mates

sat inside. Their faces were sad and hopeless.

They've accepted defeat...

He looked around and spotted the one remaining den left standing.

The medicine den.

If he could reach the back of the den, maybe he could speak to Cloverwish from the inside.

Thankful to be following a real plan, he jumped down from the tree as quietly as he could. Crouching down low, he began his journey around the outside of the camp, his belly fur touching the forest floor.

In a few minutes, he reach the dip down towards the medicine den. In order to reach the back, he would have to slide down the dirt wall.

I could easily be caught.

From where he crouched, he could look down into almost the entire camp. Tribe cats were everywhere, eating at old bones, or talking amongst each other. Towards the entrance, cats were training in duos. Every cat seemed distracted, and no one seemed to be looking his way.

Before he could change his mind, he quickly scurried down the dirt wall, sending dust flying. His heart pounding in his chest, he leaped behind the medicine den, praying to Starclan that he wasn't seen. He waited to hear yowls of surprise, but nothing came.

He let out the breath he was holding in, and turned to the den wall.

If I could make a small hole in the wall, maybe I can get Cloverwish's attention.

With his teeth, Brackenheart began to quietly tear the intertwined branches and leaves. They were surprisingly tightly woven, and it took much of his force to tear it free. Finally, a small hole formed, and he peered through it with narrowed eyes.

He couldn't see much, only the entrance to the den where two tribe cats sat guarding it. Thankfully their backs were turned.

Cloverwish suddenly walked past his line of vision and he whispered her name to try and get her attention. She didn't seem to hear him, and she walked out of his vision again, seemingly focused on something.

"Cloverwish!" He whispered a little louder.

The she-cat padded into his vision again, her ears pricked.

"Cloverwish!" He hissed again.

She then turned her head towards him, her eyes widening. She glanced behind her at the guards before padding towards him.

"Who are you?" She whispered, peering through the hole.
She probably can only see my eyes.

"Brackenhear- er, Brackenpaw!"

"Brackenpaw...?" Her eyes welled up with tears. "Your alive!"

"Shhh!" And glanced behind him. "And yes I'm alive."

"Autumnleaf...she said she killed you. That she was going to kill all of the chosen ones. We thought the prophecy was destroyed..."

"Well its not. I've been training with the other chosen ones. We've made a plan."

"A plan?"

"Yes and we don't have much time. We need to get all of the Thunderclan cats out of this camp."

"We can't, Brackenpaw..." Cloverwhish's voice cracked. "Theres too many...we will lose this fight."

"By ourselves, yes. But with all four clans fighting together, we have a chance. What I'm trying to say, is that we need to get to four

trees. The other chosen ones are doing the same thing as I am."

"Four trees..." The she-cat whispered. "Of course! The vision was at four trees!"

"Shhh!" The tom hissed again. "I need to get everyone out for this to work."

"If they knew you were alive, I'm almost positive their hope will return. With hope, they will be ready to fight."

"What are you saying?"

"Show yourself to them. Tell them you and the chosen ones are alive and well. Tell them to follow you for the freedom of the clans. They will trust you. And hopefully they will follow you."

"Hopefully?"

"I don't know if this will work but...I have hope that it will. That's what matters."

"Hey!"

Cloverwish turned suddenly, one of the guards padding towards her, his fur on end.

"Who are you talking to?" The guard hissed.

"I guess I don't have any other choice." Brackenheart meowed quickly before turning and scrambling up the dirt wall.

The guard pushed past Cloverwish, peering through the hole to see the tom leaping over the walls edge.

"Intruder!" The guard yowled.

Brackenheart sprinted around the edge of the camp, as cats began to scurry around at the commotion. He reached the entrance where two cats stood at the post.

No going back now...

They hissed in surprise, leaping at him. Brackenheart ducked underneath their leaping forms, sprinting into the camp.

Without stopping, he yowled as loud as he could.

"Thunderclan! I am alive and well! The chosen ones are alive and well!"

Tribe cats leaped at him from ether side, and he began ducking and jumping over their flailing bodies. Out of breath, he yowled unevenly.

"Follow me! Fo- For the freedom of the clans! Tru- Trust me!" He ducked under another cats leaping form, only to look up at the High rock.

Autumnleaf sat looking down at him, her eyes wide with surprise. He glared back at her, unsheathing his claws as he remembered what she did to Pebblepaw. With him distracted, a cat rammed into him from behind, knocking the breath out of him. The cat pressed his face into the dirt as they pinned him.

"NO!" A yowl sounded from nearby, and to Brackenheart's surprise, Cloverwish pushed through the two guards at the entrance to the medicine den. She clumsily flung herself at the cat pinning him down, knocking them off him.

Thunderclan cats began to scramble through their sticked prisons, yowling battle cries.

Brackenheart jumped to his paws.

"We must not fight! Not now! Follow me for the freedom of the clans!"

Hoping they trusted his words, he turned towards the camp entrance and sprinted through it, swerving the outstretched claws of tribe cats. Without looking back, he prayed to Starclan that they followed him. For a few moments, it was silent, the only sound being his own paw steps.

He stopped in his tracks, turning to look back. Once again it was

quiet, and hope began to sink from him. When suddenly, the ground began to almost shake. He narrowed his eyes to see his clanmates sprinted towards him, yowling battlecries.

The tribe cats were close behind them, hissing in confusion as they snapped at their heels.

"YES!" Brackenheart yowled in victory as he turned again and sprinted in the direction of four trees.

He leaped over rocks and bushes, glancing behind him every once in awhile to make sure they were still following him.

Cloverwish was right. All it took was hope to have them trust me.

He unsheathed his claws as he swerved a large, fallen tree branch.

Autumnleaf better be close behind.

A few minutes passed of blindly running forward, until he screeched to halt, almost falling over a small dip in the earth.

Down below was four trees, the large, familiar roots trailing over the small hallow. But it was empty, no other clan in sight. Not even Sagebreeze was there.

Come on, come on...

He looked over his shoulder to see the large group of cats coming nearer.

We can't fight them off on our own for too long...

He glanced around the empty hallow again, his heart beginning to pound in his chest.

Suddenly, a cat burst through a pile of bushes on the other side of the dip into four trees.

"Breezerunner!" Brackenheart yowled in surprise.

Another cat followed him, then another and another until the whole

of Windclan burst into the hallow. He looked behind him again to see his clan now a few cat lengths away, and with a screech he jumped down over the edge.

Tribe cats began to leap down into the hallow, jumping towards the Windclan warriors. But before they could, the Thunderclan cats tumbled into the clearing, screeching cries of fury.

Windclan blinked in surprise but quickly preceded into the battle.

Suddenly, cats from all four clans were in the four trees clearing, fighting for their lives against the furious tribe.

A cat suddenly leaped over Brackenheart's form, landing in front of him with a hiss.

"Autumnleaf." He growled.

Her eyes were crazy and filled with hate, her fur on end.

"You have made a huge mistake." She hissed. "And now, I'm going to have to kill you *again*." With that, the she-cat leaped at him, her claws outstretched.

The final battle, had finally begun.

Chapter Twenty Five

[image]

The screeches and yowls of pain were deafening, forcing Fernwish to pin her ears back.

Sure enough, the plan had worked. All four clans fighting together seemed like the best odds they had for winning. But as she gazed around at the scene, she noticed the fierceness and hostility that drives the tribe cats strength.

This was going to be a long and bloody fight.

She turned her head to see a small, white, Thunderclan tom trying to fight off a large tribe cat who looked two times his size. With a loud screech, Fernwish flung herself at the cat. Tackling them roughly, and they were sent flying against the hallow wall.

The breath was knocked out of her, and she gasped for air as the cat shook its head to clear it. It's sharp, yellow eyes turned to hers, with the look of murder glinting at the edges. Fear crept onto Fernwish, but she shook it away quickly.

Remember Sagebreeze's training...

She unsheathed her claws and let out a battle cry. The cat then flung itself at her, its long fangs aiming towards her throat. Her paws took action, dodging the attacker with much agility.

The cat turned back on her in surprise, only to swipe out a paw with extended claws. In a flash, pain flooded Fernwish's face and blood began to drip into her eyes.

She stumbled around, wiping at her face desperately. With a growl, the cat swiped Fernwish's paws out from under her and she toppled to the ground.

Her breath caught in her throat, and her heart was beating at a million miles per hour.

I can't do this...I'm going to die. Sagebreeze was wrong, I'm not ready!

She could feel the tribe cat creeping up on her, as if she was a mouse being hunted by a predator.

Thats exactly what I am...

Before the cat could pounce, Fernwish scrambled to her paws, anxiously clawing her way up the cleaning wall from behind her. Unsure where she was going, she sprinted as fast as she could.

The blood still hovered over her vision, and she desperately tried to dodge rocks and trees. She gasped in fear as she heard the sound of paw steps behind her.

Great Starclan, help me!!!

Suddenly her paws caught onto a large tree root and she was flying through the air. Fernwish clumsily landed on her side with a huff. With a whimper, she quickly wiped the blood from her face. She blinked her eyes open only to screech in horror at what lay only a few paw steps away from where she sat.

"Sagebreeze!" She yowled.

She scrambled over to where the she-cat was sprawled. Her neck was slit open with a large gash. Her fur was ruffled, and a few clumps were missing. But what sickened Fernwish the most was her watch-less gaze, staring at nothing.

She didn't make it...

Tears formed in her eyes and she whimpered.

"I never should have let you go alone..."

She buried her face in the now, cold fur of her former mentor.

"Fernwish!"

The she-cat whipped around with a hiss, only to see Breezerunner sprinting towards her with a worried look on his face.

"What-

The tom stopped in his tracks when his gaze landed on Sagebreeze.

"Oh no..."

"What are you doing here?" Fernwish snapped, blinking away her tears.

"I...saw you run away from the battle and it looked like you were hurt." The tom sat beside her, gazing at the limp form sadly. "She never made it to four trees did she...?" He whispered.

Fernwish scooted away from him angrily.

"Well thanks for your sympathy but I don't need it." She instantly regretted her words as she glanced at his hurt expression.

"I'm sorry, Breezerunner I just..." The tears suddenly came back to her and she whimpered. "I can't do this...I thought I could but...I'm just not brave enough. I'm not like you."

Breezerunner scooted closer to her, letting her rest her head on his shoulder.

"I don't want you to be like me." He murmured. "I'm sarcastic and jump into things without thinking." He meowed, trying to lighten the mood.

When she didn't respond, he pulled away from her to look her in the eye.

"You *are* brave. I've seen you in training."

"But that isn't the same. In a real battle...in this battle...I can *die*."

Breezerunner glanced at Sagebreeze's limp form and took a deep breath.

"Every cat dies." He looked away from her. "I never told you this but...my mother was killed in the first battle between Windclan and the tribe cats."

Fernwish's eyes widened and she rested her tail on his shoulder.

"I'm so sorry...why didn't you tell me?"

He laughed a little. "Because I didn't want to look weak. Or feel weak. And talking about it makes it feel real. And I thought I couldn't afford that. Not now."

His eyes rested on hers again.

"But it does. All of this matters. Every death matters. Because whether we like to admit it or not, we might not be standing her right now if sacrifices weren't made. And I'm not saying you should sacrifice yourself, but I am saying that you shouldn't let your fears control you. Fight for the ones we've lost. Fight for Sagebreeze. Don't let her death mean nothing."

Fernwish nodded slowly.

He's right...

She forced a small smile. "When did you get so wise?"

He purred. "From hanging around you."

Her smile faded as she glanced at Sagebreeze.

"We'll come back for her." Breezerunner meowed lowly.

Nodding again, she took a deep breath.

"Lead the way."

He nodded and turned on his heels, sprinting back into the direction of battle.

~

When they reached the hallow of four trees, Breezerunner leaped into a flurry of Windclan cats. Fernwish glanced around, unsure of

herself.

But the image of Sagebreeze made her unsheathe her claws, and form a deep growl in her throat. Suddenly a loud noise of distant thunder made Fernwish gaze at the sky.

Dark clouds were forming, and a few drops of rain landed on her nose.

A hiss in front of her made her glance down, where a large, muscular tom crept towards her. He licked his jaws where it was smeared with blood. She glanced behind him where a bracken colored, Shadowclan body lay motionless on the ground.

Her eyes narrowed and she yowled as loudly as she could, letting her rage fuel her, pushing her fear to the back of her mind.

She flung herself at the tom, rapping herself around him in a flurry of claws. With a hiss, he whipped her off of him.

Scrambling to her paws again, she waited until he swiped, exposing his unbalanced legs.

Ducking from his swing, she swiped his paws as hard as she could. With a shriek of surprise, the tom toppled over, leaving his belly exposed.

Without a second thought, Fernwish pinned him against the ground, clawing at his belly with full force.

The cat screeched with the most pain ridden yowl she had ever heard, but all she could see was Sagebreeze. She continuing clawing until blood began splattering onto her cheeks and her fur was soaked with water, as the rain fell harder into the hallow.

She gasped in horror, toppling off of the shaking tom. His eyes looked around desperately, and he began to choke on his own blood. Before Fernwish knew it, the cat was dead.

She stepped back in shock.

I...killed a cat. I ended his life.

But she didn't have much time to think, before another tribe cat tackled her to the ground.

Chapter Twenty Six

[image]

Brackenheart's head thudded against the stone hard ground, causing him to gasp in pain.

"I've heard you've been training." Autumnleaf growled with a laugh as she circled him with wild eyes. "Seems to me you're still the weak, lousy fighter you were the last time we fought, Brackenpaw."

Brackenheart blinked away the rain falling into his eyes as he stumbled to his paws.

"It's Brackenheart now." He hissed, his eyes glaring daggers.

"Brackenheart!" The she-cat laughed amusingly. "You think getting a warrior name means anything? It means *nothing*!"

She stumbled forward, her shoulder bleeding deeply from where he had bit her.

Cats all around them screeched and tackled one another viscously, but Brackenheart's eyes remained on hers.

"It means everything." He snarled. "It means I'm a warrior. A fighter. And I *will* get revenge!" With that, he leaped forward, jaws open, ready to clamp down hard on her throat.

With a yowl, the she-cat dodged his attack, causing him to roll over, spinning around to face her again. Autumnleaf hissed and swiped a claw. He turned his face away, only for pain to flood the side of his neck.

He screeched and leapt at her again. They toppled over one another until he pinned her, banging her head against the ground.

"How does it feel?!" Brackenheart yowled over the battle cries around him. "How does it feel knowing everything you've done was

for *nothing*!"

The she-cat glared up at him, her nose bleeding into her snarling mouth.

"Because you've lost, Autumnleaf!" The tom continued. He leaned in closer until his mouth was just inches away from her ear.

"Just thought I'd let you know, since you won't be alive to see you tribe *fall*." He whispered.

Autumnleaf screeched in fury, flinging Brackenheart off of her with strength he didn't even know she had. The tom went flying through the air, landing on the ground with a huff. The wind was knocked out of him, and he began coughing for breath.

The she-cat approached him slowly, watching as he tried to regain his composure.

She then leaped on top of him, digging her claws into his shoulders as she pinned him. He yowled in pain, and gazed into her eyes with fury.

"Like I said." She meowed with a sneer. "You are *weak*."

He spat blood on her face with a hiss. She licked it away, glaring down on him before raising an unsheathed paw.

Brackenheart's glare fell as he realized his fate.

No...no this can't be the way this ends.

He raked his mind, trying to find a way he could survive this.

"So long, Brackenheart." Autumnleaf sneered.

What would Pebblepaw do?

He closed his eyes.

No. What would mother do...?

His eyes snapped open.

"Wait!" He screeched.

Autumnleaf blinked in surprise.

"I...I know your pain." Brackenheart whispered, forcing the sympathy into his voice.

"Silince!" She yowled, raising her paw again.

"Flames!" The tom meowed desperately.

The she-cats paw lowered a little, and her eyes blinked in surprise.

"That was his name right?" Brackenheart continued. "The cat you're doing all of this for. The cat that was killed during the Great Battle."

Autumnleaf shook her head, raising her paw again.

"Leave his name out of your filthy mouth!" She hissed.

"You loved him didn't you?"

She looked away from him, pain filling her gaze.

"You told me you were doing this all for him."

"And I am!" She growled. "I am doing what he couldn't." Her voice cracked. "He would have been proud..."

"Well I didn't know him." Brackenheart whispered. "But are you sure this is what he would have really wanted?"

Her furious gaze turned back to him. "You know nothing!"

"Well then is this what *you* want? To rule the clans until you die? Because lets say you do win this battle! Then what?"

"Then Flames will finally be at peace!" The she-cat hissed, tears forming in her eyes.

"But what about you? Will *you* be at peace?"

Autumnleaf blinked, her eyes looking down soullessly. Thunder

suddenly sounded loudly above them, causing her to shake her head in anger.

"Your words have no meaning to me!" The she-cat hissed. "It too late to turn back now!"

She raised her paw once again, ready to strike the final blow. But before she could, light flashed before their eyes, and a strike of light crashed above their heads. A loud and sickening crack sounded from four trees, and large flames broke out from its leaves.

"FIRE!" Cats began to screech and yowl in fear.

Autumnleaf's eyes were wide in terror, and with her distracted, Brackenheart bit down hard on her front paw. She screeched, allowing him to kick her off of him.

He turned in gasped as the flames scurried down the bark of the large tree, reaching the ground where the cats stood.

The tribe cats noticeably were backing away in fear as the battle began to cease.

A loud yowl of pain sounded, and all heads turned to a skinny looking tribe cat who had been caught in the flames. The cat was engulfed in fire, and shriveled to the ground until it was nothing.

There were shrieks of terror, and many tribe cats began running into the trees, away from the flames.

Brackenheart watched Autumnleaf look around in horror as her followers began to run away from the battle.

"Don't flee!" She yowled. "The battle isn't over yet!"

"Brackenheart!" Fernwish leapt to his side, a noticeably large gash on her forehead bleeding down onto her face. "The tribe cats are fleeing. I don't think they have ever seen fire like this before."

The tom nodded, and he could suddenly breath again. He turned to Autumnleaf.

"You've lost. Your so called army is leaving. Give up."

Her furious gaze turned to him with wild eyes.

"As long as I am alive, they will return! We *will* return!"

"I don't think so." Fernwish growled. "Your army was never secure in the first place. Too many have died from this battle. It's time to surrender."

Autmnleaf looked around again, as cats began to stop fighting and back away from the hot flames in fear. Her eyes then landed on Fernwish.

"No...I will *never* surrender."

Brackenheart spotted her gaze and yowled, leaping towards Autumnleaf. But his paw caught on a hidden root sticking up from the ground, and a snap was heard from his ankle. He screeched in pain, toppling to the ground.

"Brackenheart!" Fernwish yowled, before she was tackled by Autumnleaf.

The tom screeched in pain, trying to scramble to his paws. But every time he moved, pain flashed up his leg.

He turned his head to see the two she-cats rolling around in the ground, and he gasped as they inched closer and closer to the hot flames.

Chapter Twenty Seven

[image]

The screeches were ringing in Breezerunner's ears as he dodged another blow from a large tribe cat. Remembering his training, he used his speed to his advantage.

He waited until the cat leaped toward him and ducked underneath it. Confusedly, the cat stumbled to regain its composure. Using that, Breezerunner swiped the cats paws out from under it, pouncing on them.

The cat yowled, raking its claws down Breezerunner's sides. He screeched in pain, and he glared down at the cat before sinking his teeth into its throat. He held his jaws there until the cats shaking stopped, and its body went limp. Blood dripped from his lips and he wiped it away with his paw shakily.

Another cat, dead...under my *paws*.

Shaking his head to clear it, he whipped around as a yowl sounded from behind him. He spotted Brackenheart and Autumnleaf rolling around on the ground in a heap of fur.

He needs help. With Autumnleaf dead...the tribe cats might surrender.

He began sprinting towards the fight, dodging cats as they fought each other ruthlessly. But before he could reach them, something slammed into him, causing him to fly through the air, landing on the ground with a huff.

Breezerunner raised his head to see a tribe cat running towards him, teeth barring. He scrambled to his paws, narrowing his eyes as he recognized the cat.

Shade.

As the furious figure leapt towards him, Breezerunner began to dodge, only to be met by outstretched claws, clawing him back towards his attacker. The two cats rolled around on the muddy ground until Shade pinned him with his claws sinking into his pelt.

"Thats right." Shade hissed. "I figured out your little maneuver. Dodging with your speed. Pathetic." He spit out the last word, dripping drool onto Breezerunner's face.

He tried to break free from his grasp, snapping his jaws at his face.

"Ah, ah, ah..." Shade growled. "I'm gonna make sure you die *slowly*. Autumnleaf can deal with killing only three of the chosen ones." He inched closer to his face. "But you're *mine*."

Breezerunner bared his teeth with a hiss.

"I'd like to see you try and kill me. You're nothing. You let a former kitty pet lead you into a battle you're going to lose."

"You little *rat*." Shade spat. "You forget, I took your leaders life with a single swipe." He raised his paw, taking one of his sharp, long claws, and slowly raking it down Breezerunner's cheek. "You remember how I slaughtered your precious leader? He was weak. And so are you."

Breezerunner lunged forward, grabbing ahold of Shade's ear with his teeth. The tribe cat yowled in pain, yanking his head away, causing half of his ear to stay in Breezerunner's jaws.

"YOU PIECE OF MOUSE DUNG!" Shade yowled, barring his teeth as he prepared to strike.

With every ounce of strength he had left, Breezerunner kicked out his back legs, sending Shade flying. He quickly leapt to his paws, wincing at his wounds. His entire body hurt, in fact, it felt like he was on fire.

Suddenly, a flash of light leapt across his vision, blinding him. He yowled as flames broke out across four trees, quickly spreading down to the ground.

He gasped as the flames trickled towards him. Without thinking, he lunged away from it, and crashed into the large rock sitting beside four trees.

His vision went dark, and his body crumbled beneath him.

~

"Breezerunner." A voice sounded from far away.

The tom grumbled, wanting to stay in the peaceful darkness.

"Breezerunner..."

He winced, opening his eyes to a blinding light. He blinked twice, trying to get his eyes to focus. His breath suddenly caught in his throat at what he saw.

He was on the battlefield, beneath the large rock under four trees. And cats were fighting all around him. Except they weren't. Everything was frozen. The flames racing towards him, stopped in place. Cats leaping through the air, still as stone. It was as if time itself was stuck.

Breezerunner winced, touching his head with his paws, it was bleeding pretty badly from the blow against the rock. He glanced around again, only to have his heart skip a beat.

"Fernwish!" He raced towards the she-cat, who was frozen in a flurry of fur and claws, fighting against Autumnleaf.

He reached a paw to touch her only for it to go right through her. He stepped back in shock, glancing around with wide eyes.

He rushed back towards the rock, pausing, before reaching his paw out to it. Once again, his body felt nothing as it went through it.

"Its like it's not even here..." He whispered.

"Thats because it isn't."

Breezerunner whipped around to see Falconstar sitting behind him, the leaders tail rapped gently around his paws.

"Falconstar...?" The tom meowed in confusion.

Then it hit him.

"I'm dead...aren't I?" Breezerunner whispered.

The leader nodded slightly.

"I'm afraid so. You snapped your neck when you collided with that rock."

A laugh of pain escaped Breezerunners lips.

"So that's how I die? Not heroically in battle, fighting for my clan? I die, slamming against a rock like a mouse brain."

He held back tears as he glanced at Fernwish.

"I...I won't ever see her again."

Falconstar followed his gaze, then turned back to him with stern eyes.

"It isn't over, Breezerunner."

The tom glanced at his leader confusedly. "What are you talking about?"

"It *can't* be over." Falconstar continued. "You see, the second you died, Starclan lost all hope. For the prophecy was broken. The battle was not over. It still isn't. And only four can save the clans."

Breezerunner began to catch on. "And with me dead...Autumnleaf...she's going to win."

Falconstar nodded. "Yes. And if Starclan knew I was doing this..." He shook his head. "I'm not sure what's going to happen. But they're going to find out soon enough."

"Falconstar, I don't understand. Why am I here?" Breezerunner asked.

The former leader blinked and stood up, padding towards him

slowly.

"Starclan believes they shouldn't alter destiny with the abilities they posses. I...simply can't just stand by and do nothing as the clans fall. When I know there is something I can do."

The leader inched his face closer to the warriors until they were a whisker length apart.

"I won't let this be the end. I won't let this be *your* end."

"Falconstar-

"Save the clans, Breezerunner. Don't make me regret this."

With that, the leader closed his eyes and pressed his nose to Breezerunner's.

~

Breezerunner's eyes snapped open, and he gasped for breath. His heart was beating out of his chest, and his whole world was blurry. But he felt no pain. And as his vision cleared, and his ears stopped ringing, he glanced around in shock.

He was back on the battle field, the real one, as cats all around him fought and screeched.

He reached a paw to touch his head, to feel the blood gone. He scanned his body, only to realize all his wounds were some how healed.

"Falconstar..." He whispered. "He brought me back..."

Before he had time to think much farther, the sound of wood snapping was heard from above him, and he glanced up to see a flaming tree branch hurtling towards him.

He darted out of the way quickly, gasping for breath as smoke began to circle around him. But only one thing appeared in his mind.

Fernwish.

He glanced around in fear, only to spot her where he saw her last. The she-cat was cornered in a wall of fire, Autumnleaf stalking towards her, her tail lashing violently. Fernwish had one of her front paws raised, a long gash along her elbow.

She can't fight.

Without a second thought, he began to run towards her, and it almost seemed like the world began to slow around him.

Falconstar brought me back. I can't let that be for nothing.

His eyes were glued to Fernwish. His Fernwish. His everything. He loved her, and he couldn't live without her. He wouldn't let her die.

His eyes then turned to Autumnleaf as he neared the two she-cats. His gaze narrowed, and he pushed himself to go faster. The world around him suddenly sped up again, and Autumnleaf leaped through the air, ready to sink her jaws in Fernwish's throat.

Breezerunner yowled a battle cry, before crashing into Autumnleaf's soaring body.

The two cats then plummeted into the wall of flames, screeching as the fire engulfed their bodies.

Chapter Twenty Eight

[image]

Blood trickled down Thistlestrike's cheek, and she felt a sharp heat radiating from behind her as the flames in the hallow grew. She glared at the tribe cat and shook her head slightly.

"Your gonna regret doing that." She hissed between her teeth.

The cats eyes widened in slight fear before Thistlestrike lunged at him with outstretched claws. She pinned him easily, and the cat struggled desperately to get free. The cat began to claw at her underbelly, and she shrieked in pain.

For a slight moment, her vision was lined with red, and all she felt was rage.

Before she knew what she was doing, she hooked her claws into the cats shoulders and slammed his head into the hard, forest floor. The cat was dead in an instant. Thistlestrike backed away quickly, stumbling over herself as she gazed at the body.

I lost control...I didn't mean to...

She coughed hard from the smoke when suddenly she felt a swoosh of wind and turned in surprise to see Breezerunner sprinting past her.

"Breezerunner!" She yowled, but it was as if he couldn't hear her.

The tom ran towards what looked like Fernwish cornered in a wall of fire. Autumnleaf stood over her, preparing to strike.

Great Starclan!

She yowled in shock as Breezerunner collided with Autumnleaf as she was leaping through the air. The two cats then plummeted into the flames, screeching in agony as the fire engulfed them.

"NO!" Fernwish's agonized yowl was heard throughout the entire hallow, and all heads turned to her in surprise.

Thistlestrike rushed towards the she-cats side, her eyes wide as she watched the flames dance in victory.

Fernwish shook her head.

"He can't be gone...he..."

Thistlestrike placed her tail on her shoulder gently.

"Fernwish..." She whispered quietly.

The she-cat continued to shake her head, her eyes welling with tears.

"NO!" She screeched again, falling to her paws. She laid her forehead to the ground, yowling in agony.

Thistlestrike tried to approach her, but the she-cat shouldered her away.

"Breezerunner..." A cat meowed weakly from behind her.

Thistlestrike turned to see Brackenheart laying on his side, watching the fire with tears in his eyes.

"Brackenheart!" Thistlestrike rushed towards the tom, examining his wounds.

"I...couldn't save him." The tom whispered. "My paw it..." He shook his head. "It's excuses. I could have saved him. I just...wasn't strong enough."

Thistlestrike touched her nose to his ear gently.

"It wasn't your fault." She mumbled. "He...saved us. He saved us all."

She turned suddenly as paw steps approached. Cats from both the clans, and the tribe began to circle around the scene, watching the fire that had engulfed the two cats.

Tribe cats whispered amongst each other in shock. Their leader was dead.

The rain poured harder on the large group of cats. Their blood from their wounds and the dead ran like a river through the hallow, washing it away. The flames began to diminish and the smoke started to fade. The silence was deafening, the only sound being the sobs of grief coming from Fernwish.

The cats leaned forward in anticipation, as if they all hoped to see the two cats emerge from the wreckage.
Instead, two bodies were seen laying side by side as the fire disappeared.

"Autumn!" A large black tom rushed towards the bodies.
Thistlestrike assumed it was Shade.

Shade reached the corpses, gasping slightly as he came closer to the charred cats.

"Autumn..." He whispered. "Is dead."

He turned to the remaining tribe cats.

"This battle is over!" Shade yowled loudly.

Murmurs of surprise erupted from the clan cats. But the tribe cats simply dipped their heads in silence.
Shade gestured towards another large cat, who padded up to him quietly. The two toms then gently lifted Autumnleaf's body, and started toward the path out of four trees.

The rest of the tribe looked at each other before following them. Some glared and hissed at the clan cats, but none of them protested to stay and fight.

"Why...why are they leaving?" Brackenheart whispered in awe.

Realization dawned on Thistlestrike.

"Because Autumnleaf promised them land and refuge. With her gone, so is their hope. They rely on leadership."

She glanced at Brackenheart who struggled to sit up, whimpering slightly.

"Stay down." She ordered. "You'll need two cats to help you up. You probably broke your paw."

He sighed before laying back down slowly.

Thistlestrike gazed around the hallow as clan cats began to find their clan mates. Bodies were all across the hallow, blood staining the leaves.

So many dead...

Her eyes widened in fear.

"Rainpaw!" She yowled fearfully, looking around.

"Thistlestrike!"

She turned to see her sister sprinting towards her. The two she-cats met, laying each others heads on the others shoulder.

"Thank Starclan you're okay." Thistlestrike meowed quietly.

"You too." Rainpaw's voice cracked.

They pulled away and Thistlestrike's eyes landed on Fernwish, who was gazing at the Breezerunners body from where she lay.

"Go to her." Rainpaw whispered.

Thistlestrike nodded before padding over to the she-cat.

"Don't ask if I'm okay." Fernwish hissed under her breath.

"I wasn't going to." Thistlestrike meowed.

It was silent for a moment.

"I can't go over there..." Fernwish mumbled. "I can't see him...like *that*." She paused for a moment. "I loved him."

Thistlestrike sighed, looking around. The remaining clan cats huddled into their clans, unsure what to do.

She leaned her head close to Fernwish's ear.

"I know you're in a lot of pain. But for your sake, you have to be strong and pull yourself together. Even though you are a chosen one, the warrior code still applies. Nobody can know about you and Breezerunner's...*relationship*."

Fernwish's eyes narrowed to slits before taking a deep breath.

"Your right." Her face hardened and she stood up shakily. "I'm fine." With that, she shouldered past her, towards the group of Riverclan cats.

She took that...unexpectedly.

She turned to see two Thunderclan cats helping Brackenheart up, carrying him to the Thunderclan group.

Her gaze flicked to the group of Shadowclan, before hesitantly padding towards them.
She spotted Rainpaw and Riverpebble and purred gratefully at the sight of her mother. The she-cat had a deep gash on her side, but other then that she looked okay.

"Thistlestrike." Riverpebble meowed, laying her head on her shoulder. "You did good." She whispered before pulling away.

The clan cats murmurs suddenly died as four cats who were huddled together a few paw steps away, padded toward the four trees. They each jumped on their clan branches, gazing down at the hushed crowd.

Thistlestrike could identify the four leaders easily. Former deputies Gingerpelt and Ivyclaw stood for Crowstar and Falconstar. Breezerunner had told her how Shade killed his leader in cold blood.

"They must be telling us what happens now." Rainpaw whispered.

Bearstar was the first to speak

"The battle is over." He yowled so every cat could hear him. "The clans have won back their territories!
Yowls of victory sounded from the crowd.

"But this nightmare isn't over." Ivyclaw growled. "For those of you who don't know, Falconstar is with Starclan now. Murdered when the tribe attacked our camp. I am now taking his responsibilities." She gazed around the hallow sadly.

"But he isn't the only one we have lost."

Amberstar nodded solemnly. "The other leaders and I have talked. Are next steps forward will be cautious. For now, we are not four clans. But a colony thriving to heal itself. We must heal, and most of all, mourn those we have lost."

Whispers from the crowd began to rise.

"What Amberstar is saying is that we must all support each other now more than ever." Gingerpelt, or Gingerstar, meowed.

"And for those who are confused, before the battle, Crowstar stepped down from his position as Riverclan leader. I am now Gingerstar."

Bearstar dipped his head before speaking.

"Our next steps are to return to our camps. Begin to treat the wounded, and slowly start to rebuild. Any of you who aren't in need of serious treatment, come speak to your leader before you leave. We have a task for you. But the rest can now return to your camps. But remain cautious. We don't know for sure if the tribe cats are really gone."

Cats began to pad towards the path out of four trees in their clans, as the crowd dispersed.

"You should take mother back to camp to get treated." Thistlestrike meowed to Rainpaw.

The she-cat nodded before letting Riverpebble lean on her shoulder and follow the others.

Thistlestrikes gaze flicked to Brackenheart who was being helped up by the Thunderclan warriors. She then spotted Fernwish follow Riverclan out of the hallow, her gaze hard as stone, staring straight ahead.

I hope she's okay...

She then spotted a few cats speaking with the leaders. She padded over to Bearstar who had just finished talking with an apprentice.

"Thistlestrike." He purred gently. "Are you here to identify the fallen?"

She glanced around in surprise as a few cats were padding around the hallow, gazing at the bodies strewn across the ground.

"Thats what they're doing?" She whispered, glancing at Breezerunner's form a few cat lengths away.

The leader nodded.

"Their also going to bury them. And when the clans have treated the wounded, and the camps are taken care of, we will all meet here again to give a proper ritual. We thought it would be wise to do it together as all four clans, to unite in these terrible times."

Thistlestrike nodded.

"That is very wise of you."

It was quiet for a moment, and Bearstar gazed at her in confusion before realization flooded his features.

"Theres something else you want to say, isn't there?" The tom meowed thoughtfully.

She sighed, taking a deep breath.

"I don't think I should stay with Shadowclan. With any clan for that

matter."

The leader blinked in surprise.

"But Shadowclan just got you back."

"I know...I just...I thought I could control my abilities. But out on the battle field-

She paused.

"I just can't risk doing what I did last time...with Checkeredpaw."

"Thistlestrike. You underestimate yourself." Bearstar meowed sternly. "What happened with Checkeredpaw was a terrible accident. And I do believe with training, you can learn control."

"But what if there's a battle and-

"We finished the battle. You're thinking too far ahead. The clans will not fight for a long time, Thistlestrike. We have just endured an awful tragedy that involved much loss. Every cat knows that."

Thistlestrike nodded slowly before gazing into the leaders eyes.

"Bearstar...I'm scared."

The leader purred.

"And it's okay to be afraid. It's what you do with that fear that defines you. You could run away, and not face your problems. Or stay, and face them head on. I don't take you for a coward."

Thistlestrike nodded, swallowing hard.

"And your family needs you." The leader whispered lightly. "Just as much as you need them."

The she-cat blinked gratefully at the tom.

"Thank you, Bearstar. I'll keep your words in mind."

The leader dipped his head.

"Are you going to help?" He gestured towards a small group of cats, who were beginning to dig holes around four trees roots.

Thistlestrike nodded before padding towards the group. She stopped midway, glancing at where Breezerunner lay.

Fernwish would want to know exactly where he is buried.

With a deep breath, she padded towards tom.

Chapter Twenty Nine

[image]

It's been three sunrises since the battle. Almost every cat in the camp has been treated by now. Mudpaw and Pearlfeather certainly had their paws full.

She was proud of her brother though. He fit right in place as a medicine cat. She was sure he was going to earn his full name when things settled down. And Briarpaw would get her warrior name for sure. Cats are still murmuring congratulations to her. Saying how proud they are of her bravery and skill during the battle.

Good for her, right?

No deputy has been chosen yet. Gingerstar insisted on making his decision after the ceremony. To respect the ones we have lost.

Fernwish dipped her paw into the water of the river. It washed over her fur in a cold chill as the current rushed on.

Sighing, she pulled it out, looking around the quiet marsh. The wind was still, and scents filled her nose. It was almost peaceful. Fernwish blinked back the forming tears, pinning her ears back in frustration.

Be strong.

Taking a deep breath, she contained herself again.

Tonight all four clans were meeting at four trees for the mourning of the fallen. She didn't want to go, but Gingerstar insisted that the chosen one attend, in a show of strength.

She unsheathed her claws, digging them deep into the soggy soil.

She glanced up at the sky as the sun began to set behind the mountains, causing shadows to dance along the forest floor.

Fernwish's gaze landed on the glassy water of the river. She imagined jumping into the coldness. Letting her worries, her pain, just wash away. She stood up, considering, when a snap of a twig sounded from behind her.

She whipped around with a hiss, ready to pounce, only to be met with the surprised gaze of Briarpaw.

"Calm down! It's just me." She meowed quickly.

The fur on the back of Fernwish's neck lowered, and she took another deep breath to calm her racing heart.

"Sorry."

She couldn't help but notice the concerned look on her sisters face, and she tried to ignore it.

"Its fine...Gingerstar just sent me to let you know that we're leaving soon."

"Oh."

"Yeah..."

Briarpaw gestured back to the direction of camp.

"Shall we then?"

Fernwish nodded numbly, before following the she-cat.

It was silent for a few minutes, the only sound being the soft noise of their paw steps. Briarpaw was the first to break it.

"Are you sure you're okay?" She mumbled. "You've just seemed really off since the battle. I mean every cat is, but you..." She trailed off, unsure what else to say. "I'm just worried about you, that's all."

Fernwish sighed loudly, keeping her eyes ahead of her.

"I'm fine, Briarpaw. Don't worry about me. The battle just shook me. It shook every cat."

"I...I know that. But I'm your kin, I know when somethings wrong. Just tell me what's going on. Talk to me. Like when we were kits. Please I can-

"Briarpaw enough!" Fernwish growled, turning on her sister with a hiss. "I am fine. Let it go!"

With that, she quickly padded ahead of her, a snarl on her lips.
~
Fernwish padded into the Riverclan camp, blinking in surprise at the group of cats waiting at the entrance.

Gingerstar spotted her a few cat lengths away, and padded over to her quickly.

"Good, you're back." The leader meowed quietly, glancing as Briarpaw arrived from beside her, a blank expression on her face.

Gingerstar then turned to address the rest of the clan.

"Every cat is here. Let's move out!" He yowled to be heard over the side conversations.

He nodded to the two she-cats before padding past them, out of the camp. The group followed him silently, their heads bowed.

Fernwish trailed after them at the rear, grumbling to herself as Briarpaw joined her.

The she-cat raised her head high.

"You can push me away all you want." She meowed sternly. "But I'll always come back."

Briarpaw left it at that, continuing silently the rest of the way.
~
Riverclan was the last clan to arrive at four trees. The other three were sitting amongst each other, chatting quietly.

Gingerstar nodded to the group, and cats trailed into the hallow timidly. The last time they were there, they were fighting for their lives. Killing. And being killed.

Fernwish padded after them, gazing straight ahead. As she neared a quiet spot where she could be alone, she spotted a reddish stain a few cat lengths away from where she stood. It was stained across the forest floor, and screeches suddenly filled her ears.

Yowls of pain, agony, victory even. And blood. Lots of blood. And Breezerunner.

She shook her head violently with a whimper.

"Fernwish?"

Her visions faded away and she turned to see Thistlestrike padding towards her.
She dipped her head to the she-cat, gesturing for her to sit. It was silent for a few moments.

"How are you holding up?" Thistlestrike whispered.

"Fine." She responded a little too quickly. She was so used to saying it.

Thistlestrike blinked at her, obviously not buying it.

"I...I stayed behind to bury the fallen." She whispered. "I just thought you would like to know where...where he is." Her voice cracked at the end.

Fernwish kept her gaze straight ahead, unsure what to say. Her mouth was suddenly really dry. Thankfully, she spotted the four leaders jumping up to their branches and she gestured to them.

"The meeting is starting." She meowed.

The crowd began to quiet down as they too noticed their leaders. Amberstar was the first to speak.

"Thank you all for coming." She meowed. "As you all know, we are here to mourn those who we have lost. Those who fought hard and bravely to protect their clans. To show we will never forget their names, or their sacrifice, each of the leaders will say the names of the dead from their clan."

Gingerstar dipped his head somberly before gazing at the crowd.

"I speak for Riverclan, and I speak the names who died for us." He swallowed hard before continuing. "Honeypelt. Treeleap. Sagebreeze."

Fernwish's heart skipped a beat and she felt Thistlestrike's eyes on her.

The leader closed his eyes. "Shrewpaw."

A yowl of sadness escaped the crowd, and many heads turned to see where it came from.

Twigpaw's brother...

"We bow our heads for Riverclans fallen." Amberstar yowled over the commotion.

Silence followed as cats bowed their heads. It felt like an eternity until Amberstar spoke again.

"I speak for Thunderclan, and I speak the names who died for us. Mossclaw, Ashtail, Sandypelt, Sunpelt." She paused.

"Shadowblaze."

Their deputy...

"And Pebblepaw. We bow our heads."

"Thank Starclan Brackenheart stayed back at his camp." Thistlestrike mumbled as the cats dipped their heads. "He wouldn't have handled this well."

Bearstar then cleared his throat.

As he recited the same words as the other leaders, Fernwish's eyes glazed over as she watched Ivyclaw from the top of her branch. Windclan was next.

"Forestclaw." The leader began. "Roseheart. We bow our heads for

Shadowclan's fallen."

They didn't lose much.

Ivyclaw stood up slowly as heads rose again.

"I speak for Windclan, and I speak the names who died for us. Aspenberry, Branchpaw, Silverleaf, Mossyblaze."

A pause.

"Falconstar, Swanstrike, Featherpaw."

Fernwish suddenly stood up. She had heard the story from Breezerunner of how his mother died in the first battle against the tribe. But Featherpaw...

"His sister..." She whispered.

She remembered the stories he had told her about Featherpaw. How he had always felt lower than her, because his clan thought she was the chosen one. But he never stopped saying how much he loved her.

A whimper escaped her lips, and she could feel Thistlestrike's tail as she laid it on her shoulder.

"And the savior of the clans." Ivyclaw continued. "Breezerunner."

Another whimper.

"I can't..." Fernwish mumbled. "I can't, I can't-

She began to turn away from the scene as the cats bowed their heads. Thistlestrike dodged in front of her and before she knew what was happening, the she-cats head was on her shoulder.

"I'm so sorry, Fernwish." She whispered.

Fernwish couldn't hold back the tears anymore. They pooled down as she buried her face into her friends soft fur. A few moments passed before they pulled away.

"Their together, you know." Thistlestrike whispered. "In Starclan."

Fernwish glanced at the starry sky.

"Yes...yes they are."

"So that's it?" A yowl sounded from the crowd, breaking the peaceful silence.

Murmurs spread, and the leaders glanced at each other in surprise.

"Who said that?" Ivyclaw yowled, glaring at the crowd.

"Me."

A pure black, Windclan tom stepped forward.

"Waspclaw, step back." Ivyclaw hissed sternly.

"Why should I?" The tom yowled. "Yes we are mourning, but how can we be so carless? The tribe cats are still out there. What are we going to do about it?!" He turned to look at the group who started to nod their heads in agreement.

"The tribe cats are gone." Amberstar meowed calmly. "Its over."

"Is it?" Waspclaw hissed. "How do you know? How do you know they won't return for revenge of their dead leader. Who might I add, came from your clan?"

More cats began to yowl angrily.

"Enough!" Bearstar screeched. "I can assure you we haven't been carless. I personally sent out a small group of cats last sunrise to scout for tribe cats on the outside of the territories. And they found them. They were near the barn outside of Windclan territory. We agreed to let bygones be bygones if they left the territories forever. And I can promise you, they aren't coming back."

"So we just take their word for it?" Waspclaw hissed.

"Thats exactly what we will do." Ivyclaw growled. "They lost a lot of

their own as well. And they have a new leader in command who has no interest in taking revenge on a leader who led them into a battle they couldn't win."

"You mean the same cat who murdered Falconstar?" Another cat hissed from the crowd.

Murmurs rose again, and the loudness was overwhelming.

Fernwish dug her claws into the earth.

"SILENCE!" A screech sounded from next to her.

The hallow was quiet in a split second, and all eyes were on Thistlestrike. She raised her head high before padding through the cats towards the front. She then turned to address them face to face.

"We are here to mourn." She meowed in disbelief. "And yet here we are, fighting amongst each other." Her eyes roamed the group, and a few faces looked away in regret.

"I am no leader." She continued. "But even I know, starting another fight is the last thing we need right now. Trust me, I want revenge just as much as you do. But let's not let the lives we've lost be in vain, only to go fight again. Witch we can't even be sure we can win."

Cats began to nod and Thistlestrike sighed in relief. She then glanced at the sky, watching as the stars almost seemed to look brighter now.

"Look up." She whispered. "Every cat we've lost...they're right there. Watching over us. I don't think they want us to go out for blood." She then looked back down at the cats. "They want us to rebuild. To thrive again. So let's do just that. If not for us, for them."

With that, she padded back to her original place, where Fernwish waited with eyes wide before glancing back at the leaders.

Ivyclaw sat down again, her fur lowering. With one last glare at Waspclaw, she nodded to Thistlestrike gratefully.

"That was...inspiring." Amberstar purred. "And she's right. For now, we continue to rebuild. We have a long way to go, but we can do it. Right now, we need each other more than ever."

Bearstar dipped his head to the leaders.

"Until we meet again at the next four trees, Shadowclan will do just that."

With that, the leader leaped from his branch, nodding to his fellow clan mates.

The other leaders began to follow, and the clans started to file out of the hallow.

"That all happened so fast." Fernwish whispered, blinking in surprise.

Thistlestrike glanced at her clan who were padding out of the clearing.

"Come with me." She whispered.

Fernwish followed the she-cat towards the four trees roots, where noticeable patches of uneven soil were circled around it. She led her to the middle of the tree, glancing down at the makeshift grave.

"Breezerunner." Fernwish mumbled.

Thistlestrike nodded. "I should let you be alone." She began to turn away.

"Thank you." Fernwish whispered, her eyes glued to the ground. There was no response, and she waited until the sound of paw steps were gone, and the hallow was empty.

She placed a paw over the soil, holding back more tears.

"Breezerunner." She meowed. "I don't know if you can hear this but...I miss you so much" She whimpered. "Why did you have to be the hero?"

She shook her head, laughing slightly. "Of course you had to be. Thats what you always wanted to be. For you clan." Her voice cracked. "For me."

She then glanced at the sky.

"I just hope it was worth it."

Fernwish stood up, padding out of the hallow without looking back. She didn't want to see anymore flash backs. She didn't want to remember anything from the battle.

But she did desperately hold onto the memories she shared with those she loved. And those she lost. And as she padded alone through the dark forest, she pinned her ears back and narrowed her eyes.

She remembered Thistlestrike's words. How they shouldn't start a fight after everything they've lost. But she couldn't help but wonder if Waspclaw's words might have actually meant something. The tribe could return. And kill every cat she loved.

Her heart skipped a beat. She couldn't let that happen. Not ever again.

But I won't risk the lives of any other cat...

But she would certainly risk her own.

Before she knew what was happening, her paws steered her away from the direction of Riverclan camp, and towards Windclan. Towards the barn. Towards the tribe.

~

The sun would be rising above the mountains by the time Fernwish was walking back to her camp.

She was covered in dark red blood, dripping in it.

It was as if she swam in a pool of it. She refrained from licking her dry lips, not wanting it to get in her mouth.

She crossed the Windclan border into Riverclan territory.

What would she say to her clan mates when she returned looking like this? No, she wouldn't say anything. She would head straight to the river, wash the blood off, and tell them she fell asleep at four trees. Still mourning the losses.

At least *that* part was true.

No, she wasn't going to tell them how she went to the barn, found the tribe cats scent, and followed it to a secluded hallow just a few miles away.

She wouldn't tell them how she watched the small group of remaining tribe cats sleep. No cat on guard. Why would they need too?

She wouldn't tell them how she went by to each cat, and took an expert claw, stabbing it in their throat. How their eyes opened in surprise, but couldn't make a noise.

How she managed to kill half of them, until one woke up in shock.

She had to fight off the rest.

And she did. Half of the blood on her was her own. She would need a cover story for how she got these wounds. Attacked by a fox maybe? A badger?

But no, she wouldn't tell them how she saved Shade for last.

Watched as he yowled in agony at the sight of his fallen tribe. And how she leaped at the tom, hooked her teeth into his throat, and ripped it out. She watched that cat bleed to death.

Then she padded out of that hallow, now covered in blood, littered with dead bodies.

And here she is, deciding her cover story.

As the sun rose over the horizon, and the birds began to tweet, Fernwish couldn't have felt more satisfied.

Epilogue

[image]

"Deep breaths, deep breaths!"

I AM BREATHING DEEP, MOUSE BRAIN!

"Your almost there. You're doing great!"

GREAT STARCLAN JUST SHUT UP!

"Your done! Your done."

Fernwish opened her eyes, sighing in relief. Mudpelt gazed at her in awe before nudging her gently.

"You did it." He purred softly.

Fernwish peered around her brothers form, spotting Pearlfeather grooming two, small creatures.

"Can...can I see them?" She huffed between breaths.

"Of course." Pearlfeather purred before carrying the two kits over to her.

Fernwish gazed at her kin softly, licking them each in turn.

One of them was a tiny she-kit with light brown fur.

"She's a spitting image of you." Mudpelt whispered, following her gaze.

She then turned to the tiny tom, and her eyes widened. The kits fur was a pure white, and his muzzle and paws were gray. She almost didn't recognize the familiarity.

"He looks exactly like Breezerunner..." She meowed before she

could stop herself.

Mudpelt's brow furrowed in confusion as he peered closer to the tom. A few silent moments passed until he looked up at his sister in shock.

"But...the father is Twigclaw." He lowered his voice, glancing at Pearlfeather who was sorting through some herbs a few tail lengths away. "How did you have a kit that looks nothing like you or the father?" He hissed between his teeth.

Fernwish shook her head in shock.

"This can't be happening..." She whispered, her eyes welling. "I was just starting to move on...and now..." She watched the tiny kit, and her throat began to dry.

He looks exactly like him.

"Fernwish, answer me." Mudpelt growled.

She looked up at her brother.

"I...me and Breezerunner...before he-

Before she could finish, Pearlfeather padded over to them, carrying a few herbs in her jaws.

"Eat these." She purred before glancing between the two cats. "Everything okay?"

"Yes." Mudpelt meowed light heartedly. "Just excited to have more kin in the bloodline." He then leaned close to Fernwish's ear. "Tell her nothing." He hissed before padding away.

Pearlfeather shrugged then followed the tom.

Fernwish sighed a shaky breath, stuffing the bitter herbs down her throat. She then glanced down at her kits, who were now huddled against her side.

"Whatever happens..." She whispered. "I won't let anything bad

happen to you."

A memory suddenly flashed before her eyes. Breezerunner, leaping into the flames. She shook her head, clearing the vision, before another one formed.

Her walking back to camp that one sunrise, covered in the blood of her enemies. Her eyes narrowed into slits.

"I promise."